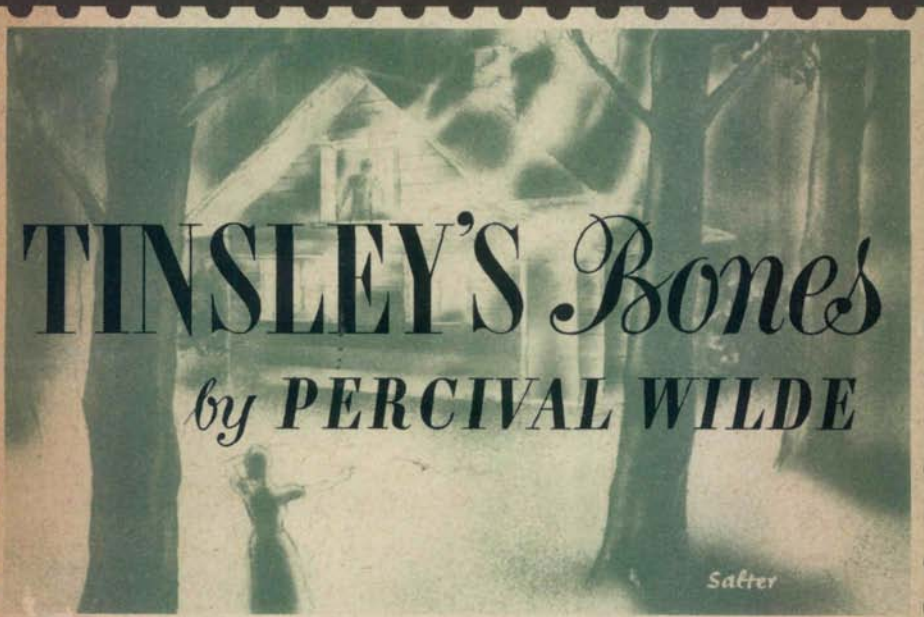
A Mercury Mystery



TINSLEY'S Bones

by PERCIVAL WILDE

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TINSLEY'S BONES

BY

PERCIVAL WILDE

A MERCURY MYSTERY

THE AMERICAN MERCURY • NEW YORK

LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK, *Publisher*

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"UNACCUSTOMED as I am to public speaking . . ."

Those, probably, would be the words with which I should commence if I were suddenly called upon to address an audience, for the task with which I am most familiar, that of expounding Latin and Greek to a class of unruly youngsters, is hardly comparable to the more serious business of holding forth to a group of mature men and women.

"Unaccustomed as I am to writing for the public . . ."

An apology of that nature is definitely in order now that I have resolved to broadcast to the four winds what I know of the inefficient, nay, scandalous manner in which justice is administered in the village of Taunton, Litchfield County, Connecticut. *Justitia suum cuique distribuit*, wrote Cicero: "To each justice deals out what is his due." Perhaps — but the great orator never met our autocratic coroner, the "Honorable" Lee Slocum.

I have discussed the situation with a number of my friends.

The rector, the Reverend Mr. Ewing, remarked, "My word! Tst! Tst! Whatever are we coming to? My word!"

Such language, in the mouth of that godly man, is sufficiently revealing.

Mr. George Fenwick, who is writing a scholarly work on Colonial doorways in Southern New England, and who spends much of his time traveling about photographing specimens he wishes to illustrate in his forthcoming book, exclaimed, "I will be jiggered, Inglis! Indeed, Inglis, I will be jiggered!" which is a strong expression for so mild an individual.

Miss Cynthia Speake, on whose living-room table I invariably observe serious books autographed by well-known authors, and who has been a patron of the arts for almost fifty years, heard me out patiently, nodding her gray head from time to time, and commented at last, "Mark me well, Mr. Inglis: we'd be better off under totalitarianism! Whatever is the village coming to?"

I smiled. "You have hit it off in a word, Miss Speake. If the coroner, the 'Honorable' Lee Slocum, is not a totalitarian, I do not know how else to describe him."

"Don't you?" said Miss Speake, blinking rapidly. "Is he?" she added, blinking again. It just goes to show how little people know about each other, even in a tiny hamlet like this. Do you think he's a fifth columnist, Mr. Inglis?"

"You mistake me . . ."

"You said he was a totalitarian."

"If there were ever more totalitarian proceedings than those which took place before Mr. Slocum and his jury of bucolic nincompoops, I should like . . ."

The good lady interrupted. "Weren't you a member of the jury, Mr. Inglis?"

"I was, but . . ."

"Doesn't a jury have to vote unanimously to find a verdict?"

"It does, but . . ."

"Your conception of totalitarianism is strangely different from mine. Why don't you buy yourself a dictionary?"

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I began to regret having used the sesquipedalian word — and I already own enough dictionaries: English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Latin, Greek and polyglot. "I was discussing the administration of justice in Taunton, Litchfield County . . ."

Miss Speake shrugged her shoulders. "I suppose it's like the administration of the water supply, the sewage system, the garbage disposal system, and the fire company."

"Inefficient?"

"Shall we say — personal and human?"

"Very well, personal and human."

"And you would like it to be superhuman? Mr. Inglis, the way of the reformer is hard! It is better, far better, to stick to the straight and narrow path!"

I do not recall when I have heard a quotation more grotesquely misapplied, but I passed it over. "If we, who want to see the world a better place in which to live, are to be deterred by difficulties . . ."

"God bless you!" said Miss Speake, blinking rapidly once more. "God bless you, Mr. Inglis, because you will need His blessing. And now, let us have no more talk about totalitarianism."

"I am opposed to it," I said firmly.

"I knew I would win you around," she said, smiling, and offering me her hand to signify that our interview was over. "The administration of justice in Taunton is a disgrace. I shall write to the G-men about Mr. Slocum. And if the water company doesn't fix that leaky hydrant in front of my house before the week is out, I shall complain about them, too. Don't be frightened of the dog as you go out, Mr. Inglis; he won't bite you unless you run."

It is evident, therefore, that there are persons of consequence who coincide in my opinions.

2

I state, as a matter of record, that I was a member of the coroner's jury which sat in inquest on the bodies of Dwight Charlton and William Minturn, both found shot through the heads on the property adjoining mine in this village. Against my protests, the coroner, an uneducated man, unable to speak grammatically or to think clearly, allowed a mass of foolish and irrelevant evidence to be introduced.

That phrase should be changed. He did not "allow" it to be introduced. He introduced it himself, his object, as he admitted naïvely at our first session, having been to make the proceedings as lengthy as possible. The coroner, it appears, is paid so much a folio for listening to evidence. The court stenographer is paid in a similar manner for making it part of the record. Since the court stenographer is Miss Phyllis Slocum, the coroner's tow-headed daughter, Mr. Slocum ingeniously contrived to have her take down in shorthand the testimony of the most garrulous and least important witness at the home of that witness — instead of bringing him into the courtroom, and questioning him there — and then, by having Miss Slocum read *in extenso* a doddering old man's observations on lawn-mowers, elm trees, orioles, squirrels, dogs, and the alcoholic capacity

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of a distinguished literary critic, he doubled her fee at the same time that he more than doubled his own.

Ben Willett, whose perennial jest it is that he has mowed the village green "temporary" for more than fifty-three years, was not the only witness who was thus permitted to testify *in absentia*. A celebrated American publisher, a gentleman, incidentally, whom I should have liked to meet, and did not, was allowed to submit his day-by-day diary instead of making a personal appearance before us; and the literary critic whose reviews of the newest books are my *obiter dicta* was allowed to enter the room only after my fellow jurymen had bludgeoned me into assenting to a ridiculous verdict.

Had I been given an opportunity to question but a few of the witnesses, I should have been able to clear up the case. To me it was perfectly obvious that after an unfortunate accident, bound to occur when dangerous weapons were handled by persons who had had little experience with them, the man to blame for it had committed suicide. While evidence was introduced tending to make this conclusion less clear, I realized at once that it had been manufactured for the purpose of prolonging the inquest — and increasing fees — and did not allow it to befog me. I add, because it is important, that the newspaper to which the distinguished critic still contributes regularly printed an account of the double tragedy which coincided in every particular with my own views. Since the critic was here at the time, and doubtless communicated with his editor, the newspaper item assuredly represents his own findings. We agree, therefore, and if I am wrong, I am content to be wrong in such excellent company. But the jurymen, who informed me that we should all be locked up together overnight if I declined to vote with them, bludgeoned me, as I have intimated, into concurring in a verdict which was farcical. I do not smoke, being allergic to nicotine in all its forms; and the coroner, in celebration of his first case, had presented the jury with a box of the vilest-smelling cigars that have ever offended my sensitive nostrils. Assailed by billows of foul, oleaginous smoke, I retained consciousness; but I could have retained little more than that, for it is unhappily a matter of record that I agreed with the five others that "The deceased — both of them — *come to their death* by reason of *shock* to the nervous system." The italics, showing the grammatical errors which the foreman of the jury introduced into a single sentence, are mine. It goes without saying, I trust, that had I not been reduced to a condition verging on the comatose, I should have insisted on changing the verb from the present to the perfect tense, and on substituting the plural forms of the italicized nouns. And having done that, I should then have thrown out the verdict altogether, as a gross understatement of fact.

3

Some weeks after the inquest, I chanced to meet the "Honorable" Lee Slocum in front of the post-office. After the usual greetings, reserved on my side, but effusive on his, I ventured to remark, "Mr. Slocum, there's just one

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thing I never understood."

"Only one?" said he, contracting his buccal muscles suddenly, and, with a loud click, shooting a stream of tobacco juice in the direction of the majestic elms which edge our village green. "Well, naow, there ain't hardly ever been a day of my life that there wasn't somethin' I didn't understand. What makes a tree grow? Why does water freeze? Why are women folks so pernickety? An' that's on'y the beginnin'. Mr. Inglis, you're a heap wiser'n me."

"I was referring to the inquest," I said, with dignity.

"Oh, the inquest!"

"Precisely. There was only one thing I didn't understand."

"An' what was that?"

"Why didn't you have Phyllis read the Constitution into the record?"

Thoughtfully he added a large segment of tobacco to the quid on which he was already working. "The Cons'itution? You mean the Cons'itution of these here United States?"

"It is only that Constitution," I said, raising my hat, "to which the definite article is invariably prefixed; and it was that Constitution I had in mind."

"Why?"

"It would have made the number of folios very much larger."

His eyes positively gleamed. "So 't would! So 't would! Mr. Inglis, why didn't you tell me w'ile we was in session? I give you my word I never even thought of it!"

"You mean — you mean you would have done it if I had suggested it?"

"I ain't sayin' yes, an' I ain't sayin' no," he equivocated, "but I would have took it under advisement. I sort o' like to take things under advisement."

What is to be done with a man like that?

As I have explained, he increased the length of the record by presenting unnecessary witnesses. My protests were overruled, though they were encouraged. The reason? The more protests, the more folios!

The other jurors, I am bound to admit, did not object to the extreme prolixity of the proceedings; they drew three dollars a day each for their slight services, and as Mr. Slocum pointed out frankly at our first session, "The longer they set, the more they get." Then, when it developed that there were two bodies, instead of the one with which we had commenced, he immediately informed us that our compensations would be doubled — as would his own — and I know positively that the jury, except for myself, was greatly pleased. The Italian town cobbler, who, I may venture to assume, had never earned six dollars *per diem* in his life, was paid at that rate for pretending to listen to evidence from ten to twelve in the mornings, and again for an hour and a half or two hours in the afternoons. I say "pretending" because he is hard of hearing and did not understand what was going on. On the first day he remarked brightly, "I vote guilty — guilty as hell." He repeated that remark at intervals throughout the hearings, and when, at the end of the inquest, we retired to an inner room to consider our verdict, he commenced the debate by remarking once more, "I vote guilty —

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guilty as hell."

I shouted at him — the only way to make him hear, "Who is guilty? Who?" and when he finally heard me, he answered, "Both of 'em, Meesta Inglis: Meesta Charlton an' Meesta Minturno."

Charlton and Minturn were the dead men, and our brilliant juror proposed to find *them* guilty — of what, only Heaven knows!

Warren Bartlett, who had more or less elected himself our foreman, was obviously delighted to be paid six dollars a day. He had the effrontery to say, "Six dollars for four hours; that's good money, 'specially at a time o' year when I ain't so busy."

Messers Hutchins, Easton, and Newman agreed with him, and when Bartlett proposed the verdict which we subsequently brought in, only Easton held out against it, and that for a reason so utterly disgraceful that I hesitate to set it on paper. He did not disapprove of the verdict itself — far from it! But he said, "Why don't we play stud all night, Warren, an' bring in the verdict tomorrow? That way we'll get six dollars more apiece."

The others thought the suggestion meritorious — Easton had actually brought a deck of cards with him — and would have acted upon it had I not threatened to expose them.

Again I ask: what is to be done about men like that?

We brought in our ridiculous verdict (I had to admit — who would not? — that a bullet through the head would be a shock to any nervous system), we received the thanks of the "honorable" coroner, and life went on as before. But not quite as before, for I had resolved that never again would I be a party to such a caricature of investigation.

4

I digress.

I believe I am particularly well qualified to look into the motives of others.

I am a retired teacher of the classics, and after prodding the adolescent generation into Latin and Greek for forty-two years at St. Barnabas' Preparatory School, I am now living on a modest but sufficient pension. I may claim, without vanity, that mine is a deep and thorough-going culture, and I believe there are few — I had almost written "no" — problems in this twentieth-century world which did not exist when the blind bard sang, and the gods of high Olympus shook the earth with their majestic tread.

Yet my classical background has not made me one-sided. I learned stenography as a young man. I learned it, candor compels me to admit, only because my materially minded father insisted that it would enable me to make a living if there ever came, as he expressed it, "a bear market on the dead languages." While that contingency never eventuated, and, pray God, never will, I write shorthand fluently today, and have found the accomplishment useful oftener than I can recall. I have recorded conversations *verbatim et literatim* — and have resurrected them at times when they have routed my opponents. I have made confidential entries in my diary, where they will be safe from prying eyes. And I

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mention that, being human, there have been occasions when I have been aroused to fits of anger — and the ability to express in cabalistics which only I can read my opinions of the persons who have infuriated me has provided my emotions with an indispensable safety valve. How much better — and subtler — to record, in these pages, my true opinions of Messers Slocum, Bartlett, Hutchins, *et al.*, applying to them the epithets in which Greek is so rich, than to utter views incautiously, and risk not only being called the names in which the Yankee dialect is only slightly less rich than the Greek, but actually being haled into a law court!

I have still other qualifications.

I am an active man, erect despite my sixty-six years, a fact which I attribute to my abstinence from alcohol, nicotine, and dissipation in general. I drive an automobile well — well enough to pass our stringent state examination, though I never exceed speed limits which I consider more than liberal. I still play tennis, though I confine myself to doubles, and if the ball does not arrive in my immediate vicinity — or lands on my backhand — I allow my partner to handle it. He may not deal with it as expertly as I would, but I give him an opportunity to show what he can do, and I increase the benefit which the exercise confers upon him. And, before I forget, forty-two years' contact with growing boys has given me a profound insight into the wickednesses of the human heart and the multitudinous depravities of the human mind. The boy, as somebody has written, is the father of the man. The boy, "that unfeathered two-legged thing," as Dryden called him (plagiarizing Plato), is the ancestor of the adult he is presently to become. There is nothing in the male in his prime which did not first exist in the immature schoolboy, and it follows, therefore, that even the hardened criminal cannot conceive of rascality so novel that the boys of St. Barnabas' have not anticipated him — and that I, as their preceptor, mentor and disciplinarian for nearly a half-century, have not learned of it. Without exaggeration, therefore, I may assert that I approach any situation with a ripe experience whose value has been demonstrated oftener than my habitual modesty permits me to recall.

5

"Mr. Slocum," I demanded, "when will there be another inquest?"

I regretted the question almost before I had finished asking it. Inquests take place when there are unexplained deaths, and neither the "Honorable" Lee nor I could predict when the next would occur. I expected him to score by making a remark to that effect, for the man, while dull and slow-witted, is not without a command of what the present generation vulgarly terms "the come-back," but he missed his chance. Instead he rubbed his hands, and his eyes brightened. "Soon, I hope."

"You *hope?*" I ejaculated.

"Can't be too soon for me. You ain't forgettin' I'm the coroner. . . ."

"At twenty-five cents a folio."

"'T ain't enough."

"Fifty cents when there are two bodies."

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"What a memory you got!" he said admiringly. "But that there chicken-feed don't go far, Mr. Inglis. Have you noticed I'm chawin' tobacco, instead of smokin' it, like I should be?" Again the loud click, and again a dark-brown stream shot across the drive toward the majestic elms. "There ain't no coroner that ever lived that could support hisself an' a fambly on just one inquest."

"What you want in Taunton is more and better murders?"

He sighed. "More. They don't have to be no better."

"So long as the witnesses talk a lot?"

He looked at me innocently. "The Cons'itution o' the United States — *you* brung that up, Mr. Inglis, I didn't! — guarantees everybody the right of free speech. That's how I aim to run my court."

He had laid himself open to a deadly riposte. "When speech — ahem! — is paid for at the rate of twenty cents a folio to Phyllis, fifty cents a folio to you, and perquisites to jurors, witnesses, and constables, it can hardly be called free."

He nodded, with a new light of respect for me dawning in his bright but bovine eyes. "Things ain't always what they're called, Mr. Inglis. If they was, why would we be listenin' to evidence?"

"If there is another inquest, I want to be on the jury again."

His jaws clicked shut like a trap, without, however, propelling a stream of tobacco juice across the road. He shook his head. "You got twelve dollars out o' the last one: two days at six dollars a day. You ain't got no kick."

"I don't care about the money."

"Then it hadn't ought to go to you. Now Angelo —" (I believe I have explained that Angelo Iannicelli is the town cobbler) "— Angelo got twelve dollars for hisself, an' he told me it was quite a windfall for him an' his missus an' the little ones."

He had given me an opening. "Angelo was of no particular use to you, Mr. Coroner."

"I dunno. He didn't butt in all the time an' ask fool questions, like somebody else I know done. . . ."

"If you object to me, Mr. Coroner, you should draft other intelligent men for your jury. There are plenty of them in this village. Have you thought of Mr. Ewing?"

"A minister. Exempt from jury duty."

"He would waive the exemption."

"I guess when the Legislature passed the law exemptin' ministers, an' doctors, an' such, they knowed what they was doin'."

"There's Mr. Fenwick."

"The quiet little feller that's writin' the book on doors? He don't know he's alive."

"Mr. Seymour . . ."

"Gentleman farmer? Registered Democratic on the list o' voters?"

"Mr. Pearson. Mr. Bean. Mr. Osbaldiston."

"High-toned folks, ain't they? Honest, I'd be fidgety if I had fellers like that on the jury."

I had him there. "But if you had them, Mr. Coroner, you might discover the truth! The truth, after all, is the object of any inquest! For Heaven's sake, let us have done with Angelo and his ilk!"

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He pondered. "I don't have to drop Angelo; he's dropped hisself. He's on relief now, an' he's gettin' good money. But Warren Bartlett . . ."

"Eliminate him. He got his twelve dollars, too, didn't he?"

"You don't know what you're sayin', Mr. Inglis. Warren is a big man in county politics, an' what he says at the Republican caucus goes."

"Eliminate Hutchins — Easton — Newman —"

"Tom Easton married my first cousin. Steve Newman is a brother Mason. Bill Hutchins owns the mortgage on his farm, like he owns most o' the mortgages in Taunton. A man's got to stick to his friends, Mr. Inglis, or they won't reelect him. But I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll take your suggestion under advisement, like I done the other."

"What other?" I sputtered.

"That other about havin' the Cons'itution o' the United States read into the record. . . . Goin' home, Mr. Inglis? I know you live just across the street, but let me give you a lift in my coop. It runs just as smooth — just as smooth . . ."

"As a coroner's jury?"

He began to laugh — to cackle — in his slow, dull-witted manner. "That's a good one, heh, heh, heh! Wait till I tell that to Warren Bartlett. Heh, heh, heh, heh! 'Runs just as smooth as a coroner's jury!' Warren'll nigh to split laughin'. Heh, heh, heh, heh!"

6

There is to be another inquest!

Warren Bartlett, by the dispensation of an inscrutable Providence, is laid up with an attack of sciatica!

I am to be foreman of the jury!

I write with mingled satisfaction and chagrin, for never in the world was there less reason for an inquest. . . .

The record will be handed over to me for study and annotation as rapidly as it is typed out. In exchange, I have agreed to turn over to the "Honorable" Lee Slocum such notes as I may make from time to time: a one-sided exchange which should appeal to his risibilities (if he has any), when he discovers how I have aced him, for my comments, like these preliminary jottings, will be set down in shorthand, which is a closed book to our inquisitive coroner! But I shall keep my part of the bargain literally, handing him whatever I choose to reduce to writing — and keep a straight face, I hope, when he casts his watery blue eyes upon my cabalistics.

Mr. Slocum has promised me that at least one other intelligent man will be permitted to serve on the jury: Mr. Bean, Mr. Fenwick, Mr. Pearson, Mr. Seymour, or Mr. Osbaldiston.

"Which of 'em would you like?" he inquired, producing a cigar, doubtless in token of his improved financial prospects, and spitting the end accurately into the center of my best rug.

"Let me have all of them, Mr. Slocum!"

"All of 'em?"

"What a jury that would be! Six men, every one of them a college graduate! Every one of them a . . ."

"I'd sure like to oblige you, Mr. Inglis, but it can't be done. Mr. Bean may be a bright man, but he voted wrong

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in the last election."

"Are we discussing politics, or are we . . ."

"This is a Republican district, an' the Republicans elected me. A Democrat ain't a-gonna get three dollars of Republican money so long as I'm coroner."

"The gentlemen I have mentioned don't need three dollars."

"All the more reason why they shouldn't get it. Mr. Bean is out. The same goes for Mr. Seymour."

I made an effort, and controlled my temper. After all, I was to be the foreman, and that would give me some measure of control. I said, "That leaves Mr. Fenwick, Mr. Osbaldiston, and Mr. Pearson."

"Are you sure they all voted Republican?"

"I'm almost certain."

"Well, make sure before you ask 'em. In this here neck of the woods we aim to keep Democrats in their places."

"But I can ask only one of them . . ."

"Only one: whichever you like. But ask them how they voted first."

I was too discouraged to say more than "Oh, all right."

"The rest of the jury," said the coroner, evidently looking forward to a happy reunion with his cronies, "will be Tom Easton, Bill Hutchins, Steve Newman, and Seth Blodgett. Do you know Seth, Mr. Inglis?"

"No."

"He's a good electrician, but he can't work at it for a w'ile account of the burn he got on his hand while he was fixin' the pump motor they got down in Mrs. Chamberlain's well-pit. He was sure he'd turned off the current, but he hadn't, an' he was lucky he wasn't hurt no worser. He's a comical feller, Mr. Inglis: Seth always sees the lighter side o' things. You'll like him first-rate."

"I wonder," I remarked non-committally, though I foresaw at once how I should react to the comical electrician.

"Three dollars a day'll come in mighty useful while Seth's hand is gettin' well."

"You haven't told me yet, Mr. Slocum, what the inquest will be about."

He looked around, as if fearing eavesdroppers in my own home, though I knew we would be overheard only by my wife, my two young sons and the cook. He lowered his voice: "The doings Sunday night."

"What?" My jaw must have dropped incredulously. "An inquest, yes, but there's no reason for empaneling a jury!"

"There's a body."

"Only some of it, they say."

"The less there is of it, the more reason for a jury."

"But we all know what happened! The facts couldn't possibly be clearer!"

"They ain't clear to me, Mr. Inglis."

I cursed the man's stupidity, but forced myself to keep my equilibrium. "A jury will discover nothing that we do not already know. One Alastair Tinsley — whom I never met — was burned to death in a fire. It was obviously accidental."

"Mebbe so," he said, blowing a cloud of vile-smelling smoke into my face. "Mebbe not. Did you happen to know, Mr. Inglis, that Tinsley went about in mortal fear for his life?"

"No!" I expostulated.

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"It's so, anyhow. All summer long he heard a feller prowlin' around his house nights — an' there was somebody else that heard the feller, too!"

I stared at him, almost too dismayed to reply. "Do you mean, Mr. Slocum, that there may be living among us a monster who would actually set fire to another man's house, and burn an innocent human being alive?"

"That's what I want the jury should find out." He smiled shrewdly. "Of course, if you don't want to be foreman, Steve Newman would take the job."

I was trapped. An inquest with a six-man jury would be costly, yet were I to withdraw, the "Honorable" Lee and his friends would run up another outrageous bill for the county to pay. *Non tali auxilio, nec defensoribus istis tempus eget,* I murmured to myself, "Not such help, nor defenders like these are required at this moment," but aloud I said, "You know, Mr. Slocum, that I want to be of any use I can."

"Then it's settled," he remarked briskly. He patted my shoulder. "I would have laid my bottom dollar I could depend on you, Mr. Inglis! Naow, you pick out one of them three fellers we agreed on to be a juror, an' let me know which it is. . . . No, I'll make it easier for you; here's a blank subpoena. Fill in the name of the feller you pick out, an' tell him the jury meets at ten o'clock tomorrow mornin'. . . ."

7

I spoke to two of the three men whose names the coroner had not removed from my list.

Mr. Pearson, who is a giant of a man with huge shoulders, smiled eagerly. "Inglis," he declared, "I'd love to serve on a coroner's jury, just for the novelty of it, but I can't. Not legally qualified, old chap; I'm still a resident of New York. I always meant to be made a voter here, but I never got around to it."

Mr. Fenwick, a much smaller man, whose wavy blond hair and pale features go naturally with his gentle disposition, said, "Yes, I'm a resident of Connecticut, and I voted the straight Republican ticket at Stamford when I used to live there, but I will not serve! Why, the very idea of sitting in inquest on a dead body is revolting to me! I am surprised that you should come to me with such a request. I'll be jiggered, Mr. Inglis! Indeed, I will be jiggered!"

I tried to conciliate him. "We need a man of your high intelligence . . ."

"Nonsense!" he interrupted disconcertingly. "High intelligence isn't needed. For instance, you'd be an excellent juror yourself. Now listen to me, Mr. Inglis, for I shall not repeat what I have to say. I am not a man of the world. I lead a sheltered, quiet life. I am not interested in murder, crime, sudden death, bodies, inquests, and/or executions, and my book on Colonial doorways in Southern New England is nearing completion. I do not propose to be detoured from it for any reason whatsoever, and that is my last word. Good day, Mr. Inglis."

That left only Mr. Osbaldiston, a hearty, well-fed man given to high living and heavy drinking, and who had accordingly been my last choice, but at his

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house Mrs. Osbaldiston informed me that she expected him back from Guatemala some time before Thanksgiving Day. Very kindly she gave me some Guatemalan air-mail stamps for my youngsters.

I am always reluctant to take drastic steps, but I filled in the name of George Fenwick on the blank subpoena and rang his doorbell a second time.

No answer . . .

I rang once more.

Still no answer . . .

I walked around to the side of the house, and could clearly see Mr. Fenwick sitting near a study window one flight up, peering at photographs of Colonial doorways through a large magnifying glass.

He saw me, and pulled down the blind.

Mr. Slocum chuckled when I reported failure. "So I give you a chance to get the feller you wanted, an' he went back on you? Give me the subpoena." He looked at it and nodded. "It's just a bit of paper, but it's backed by the authority of the sovereign state of Connecticut, an' there ain't no man in it big enough to say, 'Run away, an' leave me be!' You're sure he's a resident of Connecticut, ain't you?"

"He said he used to vote in Stamford."

"That's all I need to know. I'll have Amos Squire serve this paper on him when he goes to get the mail tonight, an' he'll be with us at ten o'clock tomorrow mornin' or I'll know the reason why!"

I should have preferred to fill the jury-box in a happier manner, but I shall be glad to have another man of my own kind in it, and I shall put myself out to be agreeable to him. And with the two of us applying our intellects to the problems which vex the simple-minded coroner, they will cease to be problems in a matter of minutes.

The cause of efficient law administration will be advanced.

Fiat justitia, ruat coelum!

THE FIRST SESSION

THE CORONER: The jury will come to order. . . . Well, I guess most everybody here knows everybody else: Tom, Bill, Steve, Seth, Mr. Inglis, Mr. Fenwick? Mr. Inglis, that beetle-browed fellow * with his arm in a sling is our popular electrician, Seth Blodgett.

MR. INGLIS: How do you do, Mr. Blodgett?

MR. BLODGETT: Poorly, thanking you just the same. Burned my hand tinkering with the half horse-power, two-twenty-volt motor that runs Mrs. Chamberlain's deep-well pump. Yop. If it wasn't for the mortification which set in, I'd have been back on the job couple of days later;

* The court stenographer, who, as I have previously explained, is the coroner's daughter, uses the correct spelling, though Mr. Slocum invariably pronounces the word "feller," terminating it with a semi-fricative "r." E. J. I.

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but now Doc Fairless wants I should be careful.

MR. INGLIS: Quite.*

THE CORONER: Mr. Fenwick, Mr. Easton, Mr. Hutchins, Mr. Newman, Mr. Blodgett, Mr. Inglis.

MR. INGLIS: I have already had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Fenwick.

MR. FENWICK: (no answer)†

THE CORONER: The jury will come to order.

MR. FENWICK: Mr. Coroner.

THE CORONER: Yes?

MR. FENWICK: I ask again to be excused from jury duty.

THE CORONER: Now, look here, Mr. Fenwick, I thought we settled that once.

MR. FENWICK: You declined to excuse me, sir. That didn't settle anything.

THE CORONER: Well, I allowed it did, but if you've thought up any reasons you ain't mentioned before, let's have them.

MR. FENWICK: Very well, sir: I am not interested in crime.

MR. INGLIS: There's no question of a crime — as yet.

MR. FENWICK: I am not interested in death, sudden or otherwise.

THE CORONER: It's your duty as a citizen of the state of Connecticut . . .

MR. FENWICK: I believe the coroner's jury is required to view the corpse.

THE CORONER: That's what the law says.

MR. FENWICK: I could never do that. I am sure — I am sure that if I ever viewed a corpse — particularly one so dreadfully disfigured as this one must be, I should faint.

MR. INGLIS: Come, come, Mr. Fenwick, be a man!

MR. FENWICK: Mr. Coroner, will you kindly ask the gentleman at my right to cease interrupting me with his unwanted opinions? . . . Mr. Coroner, I do not recall that I have ever seen a dead body. Even the thought repels me.

THE CORONER: 'Tain't so bad when you get used to it. Most of them look quiet and peaceful-like: like they was dreaming. Remember you'll be a dead body yourself one of these days.

MR. FENWICK: When that day comes, I shall not be able to look at myself.

THE CORONER: No, but you'll wish you could. . . . Mr. Fenwick, if you was killed, how would you like it if six men couldn't be got together to find out who done it, or how it come about, because they was all afraid to look at a poor, harmless, dead body?

MR. INGLIS: Mr. Coroner, couldn't you refer to it as "the remains"?

MR. FENWICK: I wouldn't care! I wouldn't care! And if the gentleman on my right does not cease uttering inanities, I shall become violent! Positively I shall become violent! Mr. Coroner, let me go!

THE CORONER: Mr. Inglis was anxious to have one of his friends on the jury.

MR. FENWICK: I am no friend of Mr. Inglis'!

MR. INGLIS: Now, really, Mr. Fen-

* The best reply to prolix and redundant speech is a simple monosyllable. It leaves the speaker floundering in deep water: *apparent rari nantes in gurgite vasto:* "A few swimmers appear in the vasty deep." E. J. I.

† The phrase in the parentheses signifies that Mr. Fenwick, who is the mildest of men, merely gave me a wounded look, but did not even say, "Indeed, I will be jiggered." E. J. I.

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wick!

THE CORONER: And it happens, if I was to let you go, there wouldn't be nobody I could send for to take your place this minute.

MR. FENWICK: Mr. Coroner, you could get along with a five-man jury.

THE CORONER: Mebbe so; mebbe not. I wouldn't want to.

MR. FENWICK: I have warned you, sir, if I have to look at a dead body, I shall faint, and there will be a mistrial!

THE CORONER: There can't be no mistrial, because a coroner don't try nobody; and if you faint, I guess we'll know how to bring you to. Anyhow this dead body — I mean what's left of it — is one of the neatest I ever seen.

MR. FENWICK: Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh!

THE CORONER: I mean, it wouldn't hardly make a newborn baby faint. You just wait, Mr. Fenwick, and see if I ain't right. Phyllis, run and get Mr. Fenwick a glass of that nice, cold well water. . . . There! . . . We'll begin by having the court stenographer read a clipping into the record.

MR. INGLIS: A clipping? A newspaper clipping? A clipping is not evidence.

THE CORONER: No, but it takes up room just the same. I'll make it more regular by reading it aloud myself:

WRITER DIES IN FIRE

Taunton, Conn.: Alastair Tinsley, 46, writer of fiction for many magazines, was burned to death at his home here last night. The cause of the fire, which completely destroyed a house recently purchased by Mr. Tinsley, is unknown.

MR. INGLIS: Is that all?

THE CORONER: I thought you said you didn't want clippings. Here's another:

TINSLEY DEAD

Alastair Tinsley, who died in his blazing home in Taunton, Conn., Sunday night, was one of the most prolific writers that ever lived. A steady contributor to the so-called "pulp" magazines, it was not unusual for him to have half a dozen stories appear in a single issue, signed by as many different pen names. For more than fifteen years his output was said to have exceeded one million words a year, making a total equivalent to three hundred novels of average length; yet during the whole of his career as a writer, Mr. Tinsley never published a book.

His innumerable stories dealt mainly with detection, crime, mystery, and violent action. He boasted that he had never written a love story, and stated, also, that while he had, in his writings, been responsible for the deaths of thousands of fictitious characters, he had never written a line which might not have been read by a pure young girl.

He is survived by a widow, Betty Coombe Tinsley, who was not in Taunton on the night of the fire. Mr. and Mrs. Tinsley had no children.

"Sunday night" was three nights ago: September fifth. Are there any questions? . . . The constable will show in the first witness.

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DISCOURSE OF A BUCOLIC POOH-BAH

MORNING, LEE! Morning, Steve, Bill, Seth, Tom! Morning, Mr. Fenwick! Looking a mite green under the gills, ain't you? A good brisk walk is what you need. Morning, Mr. Inglis!

Friendly of you to let me testify first, Lee. This is going to be one of my extra busy days. Fact! Got a prospect coming up from the ciy, just like the day Mrs. Tinsley came up to close the deal I'm going to tell you about.

Coincidence?

Goodness, no!

It's because I'm on my toes, and I got prospects coming up 'most every day! If you want to sell, buy, lease real estate anywhere in Litchfield County, ring up Dula, and he'll give you action. More than thirty years of service to my clients; that's a record worth bragging about.

You want to know how Tinsley came to locate here?

Yep, that's what I thought.

For the record: my name is Jethro Dula. Address: Main Street, Taunton — next to the Town Hall. Occupation: realtor. *

Yep, business is better!

Every day, in every way, business is becoming better!

I say that to myself every morning while I shave, and I say it to you gentlemen every time I meet you.

Mr. Inglis, don't you go forgetting the forty acres back of Moore's I told you to buy! They're a steal at what Moore's asking for them, and if you don't snap them up, you'll be sorry the rest of your life. Yep! I'm going to be busy all afternoon, and you, too; but I'll be at my office at eight sharp tomorrow morning. Stop in if you change your mind. Stop in even if you don't change your mind.

MR. FENWICK: He will stop in.

MR. INGLIS: I won't!

THE WITNESS: Let Mr. Fenwick advise you, Mr. Inglis; he's your friend.

MR. INGLIS: A minute ago he said he wasn't.

THE WITNESS: Mr. Fenwick loves his little joke! You bring him in, Mr. Fenwick, and I'll be expecting him. . . .

Phyllis, that was off the record.

Now, on the record.

Fred Starke had an old house on the mountain he talked about selling. Never could sell it while he was alive. Reason: too stingy to pay a realtor's commission;

* Mr. Dula understates his importance. He is the Taunton lawyer, insurance agent, real-estate agent, and wholesale and retail dealer in flower seeds, seedlings, nursery stock, plain and fancy goldfish, ornamental wrought-iron, and decorative shrubbery. He is also secretary of the Poultry Show, a deacon in the Methodist Church, local correspondent of the Lakeville *Bugle*, purchasing agent of the School Board, member of the Republican Town Committee, president of the Chamber of Commerce, president of the Village Improvement Society, and Justice of the Peace. He sings a rich baritone. He is an earnest Christian and a go-getter, and when Gabriel blows his trumpet it will be practically impossible to keep him out of Heaven. Wherever he is, there is a multitude; for the present I describe him succinctly as a one-man quorum. E. J. I.

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wouldn't let Dula handle it.

Fred died.

Nephew inherited.

Nephew's got a job in Waterbury; don't want real estate here.

Turned it over to me for sale.

Nephew isn't stingy.

Don't pay to be stingy!

Advertised it in New York Sunday papers: "Miniature estate; clapboard house; six rooms; large garage . . ." It's a barn, as you gentlemen know, but in Connecticut any barn's a garage if you got a car you want to put in it. "Running water . . ." Well, there's a brook on the property, and it wouldn't cost much to put in a hydraulic ram . . .

MR. BLODGETT: You're wrong about that, Mr. Dula! I've seen them hydraulic rams, and they're always getting out of order, what with the silt and gravel getting into 'em! Now, if you was talking about a 'lectric pump . . .

THE CORONER: Shhh!

THE WITNESS: No current up at Tinsley's, Seth; it'd be a ram or nothing. "Grand view . . ." Well, there'd be a view if somebody cut down the trees. "Acres of hilly land which could be developed." Developed is right; why, you could make a stone quarry out of them! I'm telling you these things, gentlemen, because I want you should know that the Starke property wasn't easy to sell, and Dula deserves a lot of credit. "Ten minutes from center of prosperous village . . ." You can drive the four miles in ten minutes when the roads ain't too bumpy if you got good springs on your car, and you can slide them even faster when there's glare ice in winter. "Uniquely combines privacy and accessibility." That's a line I been using for thirty years, and I'm going to patent it one of these days so's nobody else can use it. "Owner will sell cheap for cash."

Well, ran that ad irregardless of expense; nephew said he wanted action.

Got a bite the very next day.

Long-distance call from New York: yep, ninety cents gone to the telephone octopus like that!

Fellow with a deep, rough voice, asking questions.

Asked exactly where property was.

Told him.

How much?

Told him that.

Rock-bottom price: Fred's nephew needed cash money.

Wanted he should come up to Taunton; show him the place — and a lot of others.

Said he would.

Didn't say when.

Didn't give me his name or address, and I was scared he was off the hook, but you can't never tell.

Called me back Friday same week.

Yep! Had been up here, all by himself.

Found property: easy enough if you turn from the good road to the bad one, and keep on doing that whenever there's a fork.

Went through the house and liked it.

Pushed the door open and walked right in, I guess.

Hadn't stopped at my office for the keys — which was lucky, because where there ain't any locks there ain't any keys.

Liked it fine. Furniture go with the place?

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Well, furniture wasn't anything to brag about; sure it went with the place!

Wood in the cellar, too?

There was eight or nine cords, Lee; guess old Fred Starke spent all of his summers chopping up kindlings and stove-lengths against the winters.

Well, I said he could have it; tail went with the hide.

Said he'd buy: land, buildings, contents.

Buy like that!

Name: Alastair Tinsley. Make out deed to wife: Betty Coombe Tinsley. She'd be up with certified check next day: Saturday.

I said, "Make it Sunday. Owner works in Waterbury; can't get off to execute deed during working hours."

"Deed legal on Sunday?"

"Legal as any other day."

Gentlemen, when you want action, remember Dula!

2

Mrs. Tinsley was on the train.

Met her: pretty little thing.

"Mr. Dula?"

"Speaking, ma'am."

"I'm Mrs. Tinsley."

"Guessed it right off, ma'am."

"How clever of you!"

Well, it wasn't clever, because I knew everybody else that got off the train, but I didn't tell her that. Pays to be mysterious sometimes, eh, Lee?

"Welcome to Taunton, Mrs. Tinsley."

"Thank you." She had a pretty way of saying, "Thank you," and she said it often. "What's the population of Taunton, Mr. Dula?"

"Eighteen hundred fifty-one last night — eighteen hundred fifty-three this morning."

She laughed. Oh, she was quick as a wink! "Somebody had twins last night, Mr. Dula?"

"Nope."

"I give up."

"Just you and Mr. Tinsley coming to Taunton."

That's always a good line, gentlemen, and it makes new folks feel like they're wanted here, but she just laughed and shook her head. "Oh, but I don't expect to live here!"

"Not going to live here, when you've just bought a house here?"

"My husband bought it. It's his home, even if it's to be in my name. You see, Mr. Dula, my husband is a writer, and sometimes when he's got a big job to do, he likes to get away in the wilderness, and be all by himself."

I didn't like her calling Taunton a wilderness. It's an up-and-coming little village, gentlemen, and we're all agreed on that; but it's my motto that the buyer with cash money in his fist is always right, and I don't get into arguments when I'm waiting for a signature on the dotted line. I answered, humorouslike, "Taunton ain't so wild, Mrs. Tinsley. Nobody been scalped here in more than a hundred years; but there's plenty of wilderness up on the mountain."

"That's what Alastair said. He drove up and back one day last week. He says it's exactly what he wants."

Ned Starke was waiting in my office.

She handed over the check — certified. Ned executed the deed, and I notarized

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it. She gave it back to me to have it recorded by the Town Clerk next day, Monday.

Action, gentlemen; that's Dula! . . .

You'll want to know about the Tinsleys.

Little I can tell you about them.

Knew Mrs. Tinsley would look at the house before she went back to the city. Had hired a girl for two dollars of my own money to sweep out some of the dirt, and I'd put a bouquet of my own best delphiniums in the living room.

Mrs. Tinsley looked at the outside of the house. "Small house," she said.

"Inside is bigger than the outside." She laughed.

That's a good line, gentlemen, and some day I'm going to patent it, too, like the other one, if I ever get around to it. Trouble is I'm so busy, what with one thing and another. . ."*

"Big cellar underneath," I said. I'd looked at it, like I look at every property that's listed with me, and you can bet, gentlemen, that when Dula says there's a big cellar, there's a big one, and there ain't any false misrepresentation about it. Bet your life I'd looked at it; or how would I have known about the stove-lengths and the kindling-wood when Tinsley asked me did they go with the house?

Mrs. Tinsley laughed again. "Mr. Tinsley isn't a troglodyte."

Shows what education does for you, gentlemen; that was a new one on me.

MR. INGLIS: A "troglodyte" might be defined as a spelunkian.

THE CORONER: Mr. Inglis!

* True, too true! E. J. I.

MR. INGLIS: "Troglodyte" being from the Greek, as "spelunkian" is from the Latin. Both mean "a cave-dweller," "a cave-man."

THE WITNESS: Much obliged, Mr. Inglis. I'll remember it. Well, gentlemen, I didn't know what that there word meant, but I didn't let on. I said, "Ma'am, I could tell that right off when I heard him talk on the phone. We wouldn't have such folks in our nice little village."

She laughed once more, and I guess now, thanks to Mr. Inglis, I know what she was laughing at, but I wasn't put out, and I'm not put out right now. I got my education, such as it is, the hard way. I'm a self-made man, and I'm proud of it.

Well, we walked into the house, and she noticed the flowers right off. "Oh, aren't they lovely!"

"For you, Mrs. Tinsley."

"From the neighbors?"

"Neighbors ain't plentiful here. They're from me, ma'am, if you'll pardon the liberty. They're free, gratis."

"Oh, how sweet of you! Thank you! May I take them away with me? Did you grow them yourself?"

"Every one of them, ma'am. I deal in seedlings, too. Remember Dula if you ever want to start a garden."

Gentlemen, I was handing out psychology, if you haven't got on to it yet.

Yep! That's what I was doing!

Get a woman looking at some flowers, and she won't mind if the floor is ready to cave in, and there's big holes in the plaster on the ceiling. Put up some cretonne at the windows, and she won't mind if every pane in them is cracked.

Being a city girl, she tried to smell the

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flowers, though any country kid knows delphiniums don't smell; but I'd mixed some mignonette in with them, and she said, "How fragrant! What's upstairs?"

Well, we looked through the rooms upstairs. One of them had been finished off as a bedroom, and I guess Fred Starke slept in it when he didn't curl up next to the stove winters. "Lots of privacy here."

"What Alastair wants."

Give a woman mignonette, and she's like a cat with catnip. She was so busy sniffing at it that she didn't say a word about the few sticks of rickety furniture that went with the place.

I got her back to the ground floor. I was worried about the stairs tumbling down, what with two of us on them, but she owned the house now, and if she broke her leg she'd have to bring suit against herself, and not against the Starke estate, what little there was of it.

You think of things like that when you protect your clients!

Yep!

I snapped a rubber band around the bouquet for her. Always carry rubber bands in my pocket, gentlemen; only a nickel a bunch, and they're no end useful.

"Grown from my seedlings, ma'am. I sell insurance, too: life, fire, burglary, endowment, auto liability, hurricane, plate-glass, accident, employers' liability — all the kinds there are."

"You'll have to talk to Alastair about that."

I didn't say another word, gentlemen! She knew I sold insurance; that was all I wanted.

She noticed the brook on the way to the car. "Skimpy little brook."

"Can't expect Niagara Falls half-way up a mountain, ma'am. I've known it to run dry this time of year."

"But Alastair likes it, and that's all that counts."

A man's lucky to be married to a woman like that. I said, "I'll bet Mr. Tinsley is a happy man."

"He might be happier."

Well, who mightn't? I guess that goes for the happiest people you can think of: kings and emperors and movie stars and millionaires.

I put her on the train, and she carried that big bouquet.

3

Couple of weeks later I tried to sell insurance to her husband. Everybody ought to buy insurance: that's my religion.

Drove up to the place.

New R. F. D. box with "Tinsley" stenciled on it.

New curtains at the windows.

New glass in them.

General air of spryness to the place.

I knocked at the door of the house.

There was a new lock on the door, and it was locked.

I knocked again.

I could hear a typewriter going lickety-split, like a world's champion working it.

Going like a machine-gun, gentlemen, or what a machine-gun would sound like, though I've never heard one except in the movies.

The typewriter stopped.

Heard a deep, rough voice, none too friendly: "I'm not buying oil-burners,

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Fuller brushes, subscriptions to magazines, garden furniture, or hand-colored photographs. Who are you, and what do you want?"

Told him.

Yep; said I was the realtor who sold him the place. Like to meet him. Always like to meet my clients. Welcome to Taunton, Mr. Tinsley. Ought to have fire insurance on this house.

Ought to have insurance on any house, but ought to have a lot on a firetrap like this; once it starts to go, it'll burn like excelsior. Good house. Cost a lot to build one like it these days. Ought to have fire insurance on the garage, too.

"Let you know when I make up my mind."

Same deep, rough voice.

Same voice I heard on the phone.

Typewriter started rattling away again.

"Of course, if you're busy, I won't come in." I said that twice, but the typewriter never stopped. "There's others that put their foot * in the crack * of the door * when they're selling insurance, but you won't catch me doing that, Mr. Tinsley!"

I waited again.

Typewriter stopped.

By and by I heard a couple of words, with a kind of grunt in between: "I'm — busy."

"You'll think over what I said, won't you, Mr. Tinsley? My name is Jethro Dula. My office is right next to the Town Hall. . . . If I owned this place, I wouldn't rest easy a single night if I didn't have it insured with a good, reliable company."

No answer.

I mean the only answer was the sound of the typewriter.

I looked up when I was a little ways from the house, and at a second-story window I could just see the back of Mr. Tinsley's head: bald head, bald as an eagle.

I knew it was no use trying to sell him then, but I always leave them in a good humor when I go. "I'll mail you quotations on a policy, Mr. Tinsley. I see you've got a nice, new mail-box. Now you'll have some mail to take out of it." I could see his head bobbing up and down, and the typewriter sputtered like a string of fire crackers, but he didn't answer. "I'll be going now, Mr. Tinsley; I'm a pretty busy man myself. Yep, got a prospect coming up from New York on the train. Good day."

"Good day."

I think I heard him say it, but I wouldn't swear.

I left my card stuck in the crack of the door, and I went away.

The secret of making a sale, gentlemen, is to forget about this here high-pressure salesmanship. It's good to know how to sell, but it's important to know when to quit.

THE CORONER: I suppose he stopped in

* Thus far I have restrained myself while listening to the losing battles with English grammar which have taken place in this courtroom, but like Cicero, who burst out in those immortal words, *Quousque, tandem, Catilina, abutere patientia nostra?* ("How long, O Catiline, pray, will you abuse our patience?"), I can keep silent no longer: the plural forms of the nouns which I have marked with asterisks are *clearly* in order. E. J. I.

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a couple of days later, Jethro, and took out a policy.

THE WITNESS: Nope. He didn't. And I didn't hound him! With a little place like that, and a five-, six-hundred-dollar fire-insurance policy, maybe, my commission wouldn't hardly pay for the gas it took to drive up there to see him. . . . Well, maybe it would pay for the gas, but it wouldn't pay for a fog lamp, or an extra tire, or something worth while like that. I was really doing Mr. Tinsley a favor when I offered to sell him insurance, and you can see that for yourself. Gentlemen, let this be a lesson to you. I'll bet Mr. Tinsley was sorry he hadn't took out insurance when that there house started to burn right up under his feet! I'll bet he said, "I wish I had done like Jethro Dula advised when he warned me I better take out a policy in an old, reliable company like the Hartford Fire Insurance or the London, Liverpool, and Globe! Gosh, I'm sorry now!"

MR. INGLIS: You are not suggesting, Mr. Dula, that an insurance policy would have prevented the — er — conflagration?

THE WITNESS: Well, I dunno.

MR. INGLIS: Or that it would have saved the life of the late Mr. Tinsley — which he possibly regretted losing even more than his personal property?

THE WITNESS: Real property, you mean. Personal property is jewelry, and stocks and bonds, and things like that. But if you're asking me, a policy with a good, old-line company might have saved his life at that. The fellow that takes care to have his property insured most generally takes care that it don't burn up, either. It's the shiftless man who won't buy insurance, which is the best investment in the world, that has the losses. Gentlemen, remember that, and pay your premiums on the dot!

THE CORONER: Are there any other questions? . . . Mr. Fenwick, would you like to ask a question?

MR. FENWICK: (no answer)

THE CORONER: Mr. Inglis?

MR. INGLIS: You have proved, by this witness, that one Alastair Tinsley came to Taunton, that he bought a house here . . .

THE WITNESS: Through Jethro Dula, realtor.

MR. INGLIS: Through Mr. Dula . . .

THE WITNESS: Who is ready to serve you, gentlemen, at any time. No deal too large; none too small. Every day, in every way, business is getting better!

MR. INGLIS: But since we all know that Tinsley came here and bought a house, it was superfluous to prove it. We have wasted time.

MR. HUTCHINS: Not when we're getting paid three dollars a day for it!

MR. NEWMAN: That goes for me, too, Mr. Inglis!

MR. BLODGETT: Me, too!

THE CORONER: Mr. Inglis, the jury is against you.

MR. INGLIS: Is it? How about it, Mr. Fenwick?

MR. FENWICK: (no answer)

MR. INGLIS: Well?

THE CORONER: He answered you.

MR. INGLIS: He didn't say anything.

THE CORONER: That was an answer. . . . I guess you can go, Jethro.

THE WITNESS: Good day, gentlemen.

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See you at my office tomorrow morning, Mr. Inglis.

THE CORONER: The jury will come to order . . . The next witness will be Miss Elizabeth Mather.

MR. BLODGETT: Local girl, Lee?

MR. HUTCHINS: Been living up on the mountain all summer.

MR. BLODGETT: Yop? Never heard of her.

MR. HUTCHINS: There ain't no electricity up where she lives, Seth. That's why you ain't got her on your calling list.

THE CORONER: The constable will show in the witness.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE ARDENT MYCOLOGIST

GOOD MORNING, Mr. Slocum.*

Good morning, everybody!

It's a fine morning, don't you think so?

Would you like me to stand, or shall I sit? I really wouldn't mind standing; I think nothing of walking ten miles before breakfast.

THE CORONER: There's a chair for you, miss.

THE WITNESS: Thank you . . . Oh!*

THE CORONER: To your right, Miss Mather. Here, Amos, bring her the chair.

THE WITNESS: Thank you. How stupid of me to try to sit on a table! But I wear these glasses because I need them in my work, and it's hard for me to focus on anything more than a few inches away. Once my oculist made me buy bifocals, but I lost them, and now I wear reading glasses all the time.

Do you mind if I put this box right in front of me, Mr. Coroner? I'm so absent-minded, and I don't want to forget it when I go.

THE CORONER: We won't let you forget it, miss.

THE WITNESS: I try to take good care of it, because if I lost it, and somebody

* The testimony of this witness, which I shall annotate freely, shows how fortunate is the coroner's jury which numbers among its members a gentleman (whom modesty forbids me to mention) who possesses a ripe knowledge of the classical tongues. I now proceed to describe the witness, whom I had not met before, and I do so in Mr. Dula's tabular style. Sex: female. Age: indeterminable; over thirty, under seventy. Height: below average. Weight: ditto. Hair: scrawny blonde. Eyes: appear to be bluish with greenish tinge. Wears steel-rimmed spectacles. Features: small, freckled, mobile, irregular, not unattractive. Clothing: heavy walking shoes, incrusted with yellowish clay; woollen stockings, similarly incrusted; rough skirt and blouse, similarly incrusted. Since yellow clay of the variety observed is abundant in this neighborhood, I deduce that the witness had been walking the day before yesterday, when it rained, and is now wearing the same costume. Secondary inference: is careless about her personal appearance. Corollary: being unmarried, is likely to remain so. Hat: nondescript. Jewelry: none. Speaks rapidly, almost too fast to be understood. Smiles often, usually when there is no reason for it. Her language is emphatically that of an educated woman. She carries a tin box which I erroneously took for a lunch-box when I first saw it. Other distinguishing characteristics: none. E. J. I.

* At this point the witness attempted to sit on a small table. E. J. I.

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found it, and ate what's in it, it would kill them.*

Well, I'm ready. Where shall I begin?

THE CORONER: If you'll tell us your story in your own way . . .

THE WITNESS: Very well. In my own way. In my own way. Do you mind if I collect my thoughts? That's always best in the beginning; don't you think so?

My name is Elizabeth Mather, and I think I should tell you frankly that I am an ardent mycologist.

MR. BLODGETT: It's all right, ma'am; this here is the good old U. S. A., and we don't care what your religion is.

THE CORONER: One more crack like that out of you, Seth, and you'll be wearing both arms in a sling! . . . Miss, I don't know what a mycologist is myself, but I do know you attend the Seventh Day Advent Church regular, and I say it's none of nobody's business.

THE WITNESS: Oh, it's all right! Really, I'm not a bit offended! So few people know what a mycologist is. A mycologist is a person who studies mycology,† and mycology, naturally, is the study of fungi. I am an humble student of the writings of Peck, Atkinson, Kauffman, and Murrill. They are all great, but as with Faith, Hope, and Charity, the greatest of these is Peck. Don't you think so?

THE CORONER: Fungi means toadstools?

THE WITNESS: That's a horrid word, and I never use it! Properly speaking, there are no toadstools. There are edible mushrooms and there are inedible ones. There are mushrooms which melt in your mouth, and there are others which are as tough as leather. There are mushrooms which are a dish fit for a king, and there are mushrooms which are deadly poison. But all of them are mushrooms and not toadstools. For example, I have had the common green russula pointed out to me as a "toadstool." It is one of the best eating mushrooms, and only a color-blind neophyte could confuse it with the *russula emeticans*, which might be dangerous if it didn't so promptly live up to its name. On the other hand, Mr. Tinsley called my attention to a magificent specimen of *amanita phalloides*, growing in a glade near piny woods, saying, in that funny, rough voice of his, "Just look at that majestic mushroom, Miss Mather!" He had seen it from a distance, and with its tall, slender stem, and its jaunty cap, worn on a slant, it *is* stately — even majestic, as he said. Well, except for the *rubescens*, the "blusher," and the *caesarea*, the "Imperial agaric" of Italy, all of the *amanita* family are deadly poisonous, and if the word "toadstool" is to be applied in an objurgative sense, it should certainly be given to them. Don't you think so? But it would be impractical to call the *clitocybe dealbata*, which is

* Sensation in the court, which the witness ignored. Her use of "them" is open to criticism. Since the subject, "somebody," is singular, the pronoun-object should agree in number, thus, "If somebody found it . . . it would kill him (or her, as the case may be)." E. J. I.

† Correct. μύκης = fungus + λογία (from λέγειν = speak), hence "mycology" = "speaking of (or the study of) fungi." "Mycetology" is a synonym, as is "fungology," but the last is open to objections, since its derivation is half Latin and half Greek. E. J. I.

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excellent, a mushroom, simply because it is good to eat, and its first cousins, the *clitocybe sudorifica* and the phosphorescent *clitocybe illudens* "toadstools" just because they are not. It would be absurd for me to say, "I have three mushrooms and four toadstools in this box. I shall cook the mushrooms for lunch, but I shall be sure to throw the toadstools away." No, it is best to use the term "mushroom" for a huge number of fungous growths, distinguishing broadly between them and such lower fungi as the smuts, rusts, mildews, moulds, bacteria, and yeasts. That is one reason why I emphasize the greatness of Peck, to whom we are indebted for so much of our rational terminology. A mushroom is a mushroom, and that's that. Don't you think so?*

THE CORONER: Yes.

THE WITNESS: There are many superstitions about mushrooms. For instance, even educated persons, who should have known better, have asked me if a silver spoon does not become black if boiled with a poisonous mushroom. It does — if there happens to be sulphide in the water; if there's an egg in it, for instance; it doesn't if there isn't. The presence of a mushroom, edible or inedible, doesn't affect the result one way or the other. They have asked me if it isn't true that only "good" mushrooms can be peeled. It isn't — that is to say, it isn't true. Many poisonous mushrooms can be peeled, and many edible ones can't. They have asked me if edible mushrooms haven't invariably blackish or pinkish gills. Well, some of the best mushrooms, like the morel and the boletus, have no gills at all, and the gills of the entire *panaeolus* family are black, and while many mycophagists consider them poisonous, I prefer to describe *panaeolus papilionaceus* and *panaeolus retirugis* as intoxicants, pure and simple. I have eaten them frequently, and have found their effects exactly the same as that of so many cocktails. Mr. Tinsley was greatly amused when I invited him to stop in at the *papilionaceus* hour. The thought of becoming drunk on a mushroom which is found everywhere *is* intriguing! Don't you think so?

MR. BLODGETT: What was the full name of that there mushroom, ma'am?

THE WITNESS: *Panaeolus papilionaceus.* It's easy to identify: pileus hemispheric, sometimes umbonate, grayish white, occasionally with yellow tinge; fragments of the veil *always* found on the margins in mature plants; gills adnate; no annulus and no volva; melanosporaceous; abundant on lawns which have been much manured. It really completes the "oma" series: *tricholoma, entoloma, hebeloma, hypholoma, panaeolus.* But I wouldn't eat too many of them!

* After this paralyzing statement there was a dense silence, broken only when Phyllis Slocum, the court stenographer, asked the witness to spell the botanical names which she had so freely used. She did so graciously, explaining that they were derived from the Latin, and I saw no reason to debate her incorrect assumption that such typical Greek derivatives as "clitocybe" = "sloping head," "amanita" = "a fungus," etc., etc., came from the Roman tongue. I do not translate still another term because of its outrageous obscenity, though I may state that I was astonished to hear it from the lips of a female. E. J. I.

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MR. BLODGETT: (no answer)

THE CORONER: You stuck your chin out, Seth, and you got it! You had it coming to you! Miss, I apologize for him.

THE WITNESS: I don't mind at all, really! I'm always glad to help anybody who is seriously interested in mycology. Where was I?

MR. HUTCHINS: Well, where was she?

THE CORONER: God knows!

MR. INGLIS: I wouldn't be too sure of that!

THE WITNESS: I remember! I came to Taunton because of the mycology. My friend, George Osbaldiston — he's in Guatemala now — wrote me that he had found *amanita pantherina* growing in the piny woods here. Think of it! In this part of New England! Naturally I dropped everything else, and rushed up here.

MR. INGLIS: *Amanita pantherina*, as the name suggests, is a fungus?

THE WITNESS: A rare mushroom. It isn't mentioned in Thomas.

MR. INGLIS: A poisonous mushroom?

THE WITNESS: Oh, deadly!

MR. INGLIS: And a dish of them could have killed the gentleman on whom we are sitting in inquest?

THE WITNESS: Oh, easily! Don't you think so?

MR. INGLIS: Perhaps just one of them?

THE WITNESS: I doubt it. He was an out-of-doorsy man, in rugged health, except for his teeth; and anyhow we don't think he died of mushroom poisoning, do we?

MR. INGLIS: Don't we?

THE WITNESS: His house burned down.

MR. INGLIS: So did the Crystal Palace and the Windsor Hotel — not to mention Chicago, San Francisco, Rome, Lisbon and London. Am I right, Mr. Fenwick?

MR. FENWICK: (no answer)

MR. INGLIS: It is important to overlook no clue, however unpromising.

THE CORONER: If you will go on, miss.

THE WITNESS: I wished everybody to know at the very beginning that I was an ardent mycologist. I shall now go on, and I shall not say another word about mushrooms.*

2

I came here, last summer, because of *amanita pantherina*.†

I spent a day rambling through the woods.

I found a mushroom-hunter's paradise: hundreds, literally hundreds of varieties wherever I went!

I came back early this spring: in April, but I always speak of it as morel-time.

I found a little cabin on the mountain, a modest place renting for so little that I could easily afford to take it, and surrounded by the greatest variety of soils: the sour earth which the woodsy mushrooms love; the lawn grass which the agarics prefer; decaying wood, covered with *armillaria* and *pleurotus*. I lost no time in moving in.

I told you I wouldn't say another word about mushrooms, but really, if you are a mycophagist,‡ you can live

* I don't believe it. E. J. I.

† I was right. E. J. I.

‡ The second time she has used this word. "Mycophagist," from μύκης = fungus, + φαγία = eat, hence "mycophagist" = "fungus-eater." It sounds unhealthy. E. J. I.

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so cheaply! I filled myself on the dishes which, in a first-class restaurant, would have cost as much as a month's rent of the cabin in which I lived, and most of which could not have been ordered in any American restaurant.

I didn't live on mushrooms entirely. I bought fresh eggs, milk, and vegetables from a neighbor who lives half a mile away, and when I wanted still other provisions, the walk of nine miles to the village and back was less than the distance I covered daily when I was not going anywhere in particular.

Yes, I walked. I own no car. I'm so near-sighted that it would be dangerous for me to try to drive one; and for years I have spent my happiest hours in the woods, where cars are useless.

The sun was my clock. When it rose, I rose. When it sank, I retired.

The little cabin needed no furnace and no fuel in the summer. I cooked my food over wood fires — that is the best way — and I gathered the wood myself. I had no telephone, no electric lights, no plumbing, no icebox, and not even a portable radio. In a word, I had none of the conveniences which have made modern life so complicated and so unnatural.

The R. F. D. man came once a day, bringing me the scientific journals to which I subscribe and the books from the lending library, and on Sundays I walked to the little church on the mountain-side.

In the beginning, I had no near neighbors.

Then Alastair Tinsley, the writer, bought the property adjoining: a ramshackle, two-story house, almost ready to tumble down; a barn, with broken and rusted farm-tools in it; acres of land through which ran a little brook which also ran by my door.

He bought the house and moved in.

I was glad.

I shall tell you why.

Not once, but several times, while botanizing in the neighborhood, I had had the feeling that somebody was following me.

I am no hysterical woman.

I am accustomed to being alone, and I don't imagine things; but one night, while I was reading by candlelight after supper, I was sure somebody was watching me. I looked up and I thought I could distinguish a dark shape blotting out the moonlight at the window.

The shape moved; I will swear to that, though there was a breeze, and what I thought was a shape might have been the shadow of a swaying branch.

I closed the book and got up very quietly.

I opened the door of the cabin and looked out.

There was nothing, absolutely nothing; and yet I thought I heard a twig snap as somebody trod on it.

I waited, motionless, listening — listening — and perhaps ten minutes later I heard the motor of an automobile start at a considerable distance.

In the morning I hunted for footprints.

There were none; but since the ground was hard and dry, even a horse might have walked over it without leaving a mark.

I mentioned what had happened to the R. F. D. man.

He laughed.

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He said, "There's lots of young couples that park in lonely places these summer nights — specially when there's a moon."

I said, "Doubtless — doubtless — but once parked, the young swain, if that is the correct term, would not leave the object of his affections alone to walk more than a hundred yards through a forest."

He said, "Lady, you can't never tell what them young squirts'll do."

So that's that.*

3

I didn't call on Mr. Tinsley, and he didn't call on me.

I learned he was there from the R. F. D. man, who told me he brought him a lot of mail, and I met him when I strayed on to his lands while mushroom hunting, and came face to face with him unexpectedly.

He barked, "Hey, there!"

I peered at him: a roughly dressed man, with a sunburned face, a peculiarly harsh, violent voice, grimy hands, and a head as bald as that of a calvatia.

MR. NEWMAN: What is a — a calvatia?

THE WITNESS: A puff-ball.

MR. NEWMAN: Then if a — whatever you called it is a puff-ball, why don't you call it a puff-ball? We'd understand that.

THE WITNESS: Because while all calvatias are puff-balls, all puff-balls are not calvatias. They may be lycoperdons, or bovistas, or geasters, or even bovistellas, and some of them are so warty that they could not be called bald. Don't you think so? Take, for example, the order *sclerodermatales* . . .

MR. BLODGETT: There's something I've always been meaning to ask somebody about. Is a puff-ball good to eat?

THE WITNESS: Excellent.

MR. BLODGETT: Me and the wife was having an argument about them only t'other day. She was saying . . .

THE WITNESS: They are delicious, provided that they are fresh, and aren't infested with insect larvae. The taste is almost the same as that of sweetbreads — don't you think so? And puff-balls are among the safest of fungi for the beginner to collect — so long as he doesn't make a mistake and pick *gyromitra brunnea* instead . . .

MR. BLODGETT: I knowed there was a catch in it! T'other one . . .

THE WITNESS: *Gyromitra brunnea?*

MR. BLODGETT: — uh huh — ain't poisonous, is it?

THE WITNESS: If not poisonous, then it is highly suspicious; don't you think so? What is urgently needed is a volunteer to eat it and find out. But there is absolutely no resemblance between the puff-balls, which everybody knows, and the brain-fungus, the *gyromitra*, which has distinctly stalked *ascomata*, not to mention an upper surface covered with

* Not at all! The postman, needless to say, is right, and Miss Mather is wrong. After forty-two years of instructing the rising generation at St. Barnabas' Preparatory School, I am in a position to say, and do say that there is nothing — absolutely nothing — which the adolescent male might not do on a moonlit (*not* "moonlight," noun, when the adjective, "moonlit," is required) night. Our common word, "lunacy," derives from *luna* = the moon, hence "lunacy" = "moonstruck." The deeds of youth, however, on such nights, derive from the original sin which the father of evil implanted within us.

E. J. L.

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gyrose folds.

THE CORONER: The court will postpone arguing about the brain-fungus until Seth, here, dies of eating one, in which happenstance he'll have more brains in his stomach than he ever had in his head.

THE WITNESS: It's not a real brain, Mr. Coroner. It just looks like one.

THE CORONER: But it don't act like one. Seth has been fooling folks with it for nigh on to forty years. . . . If the witness will now go on . . .

4

I shall.

I'm sorry.

I meant to tell you about Mr. Tinsley.

He had put printed "No Trespassing" signs all over the place, and I hadn't seen them; they were nailed on trees, five or six feet up, and I naturally keep my eyes on the ground.

He barked, "Hey, there!"

I don't like to be talked to like that, but I said, "Well?"

"Didn't you see the signs? The 'No Trespassing' signs? I've been nailing them up all morning."

"No, I didn't see them."

"Well, here's one; read it."

He barked that at me, giving me the printed cloth strip, and I read it aloud: " 'Notice: No Trespassing, No Hunting, No Shooting, Under Penalty of the Law. Alastair Tinsley.' "

He said, "Now you've read it, and I can have you arrested if you come here again. What do you think of that?"

I laughed. I said, "I think, Mr. Alastair Tinsley, that no matter what other people may say about you, you're not much of an author."

I expected that to irritate him, but it didn't. "I never said I was," he said, and then he asked, "Why not?"

"Because good authors don't have to pay money just to see their names in print."

He wasn't angry at all. He took the sign back out of my hands, and he just nodded. "You're dead right; I'm not a good author."

"No?"

"I'm one of the worst authors that ever lived."

"You seem proud of it."

"I am. Nearly every day of my life I write a short story."

"Nearly every *day?*"

"Nearly. If I don't, it's because I'm writing a novelette that week."

"That *week?*"

"Between times I write serials, adventure yarns, crime stories, detective stories, and assorted tripe. I write, at a guess, nearly a million words a year — every year."

I said, "Good Heavens!"

"I sell them, too."

I wondered why such a successful author had bought such a decrepit house, but I said, "You must make a fortune."

"I do. A million words would be a lot of money even at the bottom prices the pulps pay, and I'm a long way from the bottom. Quantity, not quality; that's me."

I said, "I suppose I should be ashamed to admit it, but I've never read anything of yours."

He said, "Madam, you should be ashamed only if you had! I don't write

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for the good magazines. They wouldn't touch my stuff. *Harper's* and *The Atlantic Monthly* are your pets, aren't they?"*

I shook my head. "The one magazine I read from cover to cover is *Mycologia*."

"Michael what?"

"*Mycologia*."

"*Mycologia?* Why, of course!" He had never heard of it, but he reasoned it out like a flash. "You must be a mycologist . . ."

"An ardent mycologist . . ."

"And you hunt mushrooms . . ."

"I was just about to pick some *agaricus silvicola* when you barked at me. There seem to be a lot of them here. Here — and here . . ."

"And here! Didn't you see this one?"

"No. And here, too!"

"And here!"

He watched me picking them, and he picked several himself. "What are you going to do with them now that you've got them? Throw them away?"

"Good Heavens, no! I'm going to eat them."

"Eat them? Are they good to eat? They've got rings on their stems."

"So have lots of edible mushrooms. I've got some bread, and I'm going to toast it and butter it; and then I'm going to broil these mushrooms over a wood fire, with a little salt and pepper and melted butter . . ." Mr. Slocum, I have dealt with other men who like to put up "No Trespassing" signs, and I have a special technique for dealing with them. I described the dinner I was going to eat that night: pleurotus broth — it tastes exactly like oyster broth — and a big salad, and creamed lycoperdons, and the broiled agarics as the *pièce de résistance*, and I was sure, because it had happened with other men before, that Mr. Tinsley's mouth was watering. At the psychological moment I said, "Well, I'm going, and I won't trespass again. . . . You cook your own meals, don't you?"

"Yes."

"What do you eat?"

"Salmon."

"How nice!"

"I don't catch them in this brook. They come in cans."

"How obliging of them!"

"I eat them *à la* can. . . . Yesterday I had sardines."

"*À la* can?"

"Yes. And soups — and pickles — and lobster . . ."

I felt sorry for him, but I wasn't going to show sympathy until he had apologized for the way in which he had greeted me. "It's pleasant to have such an appetizing variety of foods. Don't you think so? Such a digestible combination: pickles and lobster! Well, I'll be going — and I hope you won't be angry because I trespassed and took your mushrooms without your permission."

Mr. Coroner, it was not my first encounter with a landowner who objects to trespassing, and I followed my invariable rule: I always tell them I won't trespass again, but I never give up the mushrooms.

"Madam, you have my permission," he said, as agreeably, I suppose, as was possible for him.

"My name is Miss Mather." I have a right to be called "Doctor Mather,"

* I read the magazines mentioned by Mr. Tinsley. E. J. I.

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since I took a Ph.D. years ago, but I prefer to be called "Miss."

"Miss Mather."

"The sign says I haven't your permission."

"Look here, are you my only near neighbor?"

"Your only near neighbor — yes."

He handed me the sign which he had had me read aloud. "Look here, you've got too many mushrooms for that little box of yours. Wrap some of them up in this."

"Thank you."

"And remember that whatever the signs say, they don't mean you."

"Oh! So I am free to trespass?"

"Whenever you please . . . and I'll try not to bark at you again." A shy man, he began to come out with his real thoughts. "I don't want people to hunt game over my lands, and shoot off guns, and have dogs barking under my windows while I'm writing. I came here to get privacy and quiet — but it's all right for you to hunt mushrooms."

"So long as I don't hunt them with a gun — or a dog?"

"Yes."

"They use truffle hounds in France."

"I've heard of them. A hog finds the truffle, and then the hound drives the hog away."

"Not at all. The hound finds the truffle, and a man digs it up."

"I didn't know that," he admitted.

He walked to the brook with me.

"This little brook runs right down to my cabin . . ."

"Oh," he said.

"Mr. Dula said he could just see it, far away, through the trees. . . . It would be selfish for me to eat all of your nice mushrooms without offering you any. If you could get along without the thick steak that sometimes goes with them . . ."

"I don't eat steak," he said unexpectedly. "Er — I'm breaking in a set of new false teeth. The dentist says they can manage a steak, but I'm afraid to try them so soon." He drew back his lips, and pushed his face near mine suddenly. "Like the teeth?"

They were wonderful false teeth, nacreous, and glistening, and looking more like real teeth than any other imitations I had ever seen. "I like them very much," I said.

"Well, I don't," he said shortly.

"They could handle mushrooms," I pointed out: "pleurotus broth, creamed lycoperdons, broiled silvicolas. . . . When you see a thin plume of smoke rising from my chimney, it means I'm cooking. Now, if you cared about stopping in for dinner tonight . . ."

He recoiled as if I had struck him; that's the only simile that comes to my mind. "No," he said abruptly, "no!" He turned on his heel and walked off, leaving me aghast at his rudeness.

5

Do you understand that, Mr. Slocum?

I had invited Mr. Alastair Tinsley to share my simple evening meal because it was self-evident that he was lonely; so few people can live as I do, rarely seeing another human face, and being perfectly happy in spite of it. If he hadn't wanted to come, he could have made an excuse

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in conventional language; don't you think so? There was no need for him to be discourteous about it.

But when I thought over what had happened, I wasn't angry. So often when a man is rude — or a woman, either, for that matter — it's because a defensive mechanism is at work, and in spite of the rough, booming voice, the sunburned face, the grimy hands — and the crime stories! — I knew Mr. Tinsley for what he was: a shy man.

He had been rude necessarily. Give him time, and he would make amends.

I was right.

A week later, returning from a tramp in the late afternoon, I found a big paper bag of mushrooms at the door of my cabin. With them was a note: "These are a peace offering. A. T."

I laughed when I looked at the mushrooms: they were all *agaricus campestris*, the common edible mushroom; they were all large, and all about the same size; and there wasn't a particle of dirt on them. At a guess, they weighed a pound.

Do you infer what I reasoned out at once? If you don't, I'll come to it in just a minute.

I had kept off his lands ever since our first meeting. I made it a point to wander back a day or two later, when I could hear an axe at work, and knew that he would be chopping up wood.

He was near his barn, wearing a lumberjacket with screamingly loud colors, carrying the kindlings into the house an armful at a time, and, when I came near to him, looking grimier than ever.

"Thanks for the peace offering," I said.

"Uh. You're welcome." As shy, therefore as grouchy as ever, but trying to be agreeable.

"Where did you ever find such wonderful mushrooms?"

"Oh? Were they good to eat?"

"Splendid! Where did you find them?"

He waved his hand vaguely toward a patch of piny woods — where the *campestris* never, never grows. "Over there."

I didn't contradict him. I said only, "I must have missed them when I hunted there. It shows what a handicap it is to be near-sighted. . . . You didn't tell me that you understood mycology."

"A smattering — just a smattering . . ."

"Enough so that you didn't pick *amanita muscaria*, which is more plentiful than any other in that patch of woods, and which is deadly poisonous?"

He boomed, "I didn't like their looks."

"How very interesting! What didn't you like about them?"

"Ugly green mushrooms, growing on logs . . ." I stared at him, trying not to smile, because the *muscaria* isn't green, and doesn't grow on logs, and Peck calls it "a most showy and attractive plant." "They looked dangerous, Miss Mather. I didn't care about them. They say there's a special Providence that watches out for mushroom hunters."

"I wish there were. It's the first time I've ever heard of it."

He saw it was no use. "Miss Mather, I'll tell you the truth: I bought the mushrooms."

"I knew that."

"I bought them in the village." That statement was false, because country grocers always offer a mixture of the

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campestris and the coarser *arvensis*, and they wouldn't dream of washing off every speck of dirt, because they make money when they sell dirt at eighty cents a pound, but I thought it best to let him go right on. "I wanted to apologize, and that was the easiest way to do it."

Mr. Slocum, I knew positively that he had been to the city, because such mushrooms could have been bought only at a first-class city market,* and I guessed he wasn't willing to admit that he had gone to so much trouble on my account, but I said, "Mr. Tinsley, your apology has been accepted — and eaten."

He said, "Thanks. I was ashamed of myself. I didn't mean to be rude."

"I guessed it."

"You didn't guess the truth, did you? Your talk about the truffle hounds gave me an idea for a perfectly good story. I wrote it the same night."

"And were rude to me so that you could get at the story?"

"I'm afraid so."

I took the bull by the horns. "Mr. Tinsley, there's no reason in the world why you should tell me anything you don't want to; but I wish you wouldn't insult me by lying."

"You did give me the idea for a story."

"I believe that."

"But I have been having the jitters . . ."

"Ah!"

"There's somebody — something — that prowls about my house at night." At last! At last! "I was afraid to go to your house for dinner because it would have meant coming back here alone in the dark." Bit by bit it came out, though it seemed illogical to me that a man with such grimy hands, and an axe in one of them, should be afraid of a prowler. "I've put new locks on the doors. I've bought a shotgun, and I'll shoot if I have to."

I said as calmly as I could, "The prowler has been around my cabin, too, Mr. Tinsley."

"Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"I thought he would stop the moment a man moved into the neighborhood."

"And he didn't?"

"Evidently not. . . . Mr. Tinsley, I don't care for prowlers, but I wasn't afraid. There are never more than a few dollars in the cabin. I have nothing that would be worth stealing."

"He might be a peeping Tom."

I laughed. "Mr. Tinsley, I'll be fifty-six on my next birthday. Let him peep."

Man-like, his thoughts went back to himself. "Now he's taken to prowling around my house. I heard him last night. Why should he do that?"

"Because your house is larger than mine."

"I stand to lose a good typewriter —

* This is a bit of logical reasoning which would have pleased Sherlock Holmes, a fictional character about whom I have been reading recently, and whose adventures, to my great surprise, I found extremely interesting. However, I shall do better than Holmes when the time arrives for me to display my own abilities. In the words of Juvenal, I may say of myself, *Ingenium par materiae*, which I render freely, "I have talent (or ingenuity) worthy of the task." The fact that I write these notes in shorthand makes it possible for me to be truthful without being accused of egotism, for no unfriendly eye will ever fall upon them. E. J. I.

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a lot of manuscripts — some cash and stamps."

"Then why worry — or if you are worried, why not move away?"

"I came here to get privacy. I mean to get it. I make money, but I don't buy houses — even shacks like this — every day, and I've done a lot of writing since I've been here." The big, booming voice, and it was expressing terror of some miserable wretch who skulked in the dark! "Er, Miss Mather?"

"Well?"

"Er — you don't, by any chance, take stealthy walks — hunting mushrooms, I mean — after sundown?"

I gave him back as good as he sent. "No. Do you?"

"I type every afternoon and evening. You must have heard the machine going."

"Yes — often."

"Well, then, what's the explanation? Who prowls, and why?"

Mr. Slocum, I never found out! Even today, with Mr. Tinsley dead — burned to death before my very eyes — I am as helpless to answer that question as I was then!

6

One evening I would have entered Mr. Tinsley's house. I didn't.

Mr. Dula, the real-estate agent, had come to call.

He had happened to be passing by, he said, and he thought that if I went with him, and if I told Mr. Tinsley he ought to take out fire insurance, my opinion would carry weight with him.

I said it was none of my business, but . . .

Is Mr. Dula in the courtroom?

No?

Well, you know what he is like, how persistent?

There is no such thing as saying "no" to Mr. Dula!

It was dark as we walked toward Mr. Tinsley's.

I said, "Make all the noise you can. Sometimes there is a prowler, and we don't want to be mistaken for him."

Mr. Dula laughed. "What if we were mistaken for him? What would happen?"

We soon found out.

As we neared the house a big light suddenly flashed on, and Mr. Tinsley's voice, more booming than ever, thundered, "Stop where you are, or I'll shoot!"

The light was shining into our eyes, and the house was dark, so I couldn't see into it.

I can tell you only that the voice came from a second-story window.

But Mr. Dula had already hopped back behind a tree. He stuck his head out and shouted, "Mr. Tinsley, this is Jethro Dula! Next to the Town Hall! Yep! I'm the agent who sold you this place . . ."

I don't know how much more Mr. Dula would have said, because Mr. Tinsley's voice came again, louder and more threatening than ever: "In ten seconds I start shooting! One — two — — three — four . . ."

Mr. Dula bolted at "five," and I left between "six" and "seven."*

I ran most of the way home — and I considered myself lucky to escape unhurt.

* Shall we say "at half past six"? Smeddum by E. J. I.

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Mr. Tinsley saw me in the distance the next day, and shouted, "Come here."

I came, though I didn't like him to shout at me.

"The prowler was here last night," he boomed, "and you were with him."

I stood up to him. "It was Mr. Dula. He wanted to sell you insurance."

"Funny time to sell insurance — at night."

"I don't know what's funny about it . . ."

"I suppose Mr. Dula was prowling about, hoping to sell insurance, last Wednesday night, and the Friday before that?"

"Was the prowler here on both of those nights?"

"He was."

I hadn't heard him, but I tried to pass it off lightly. "Even though it wasn't Mr. Dula, you can be sure Mr. Dula won't prowl again."

"How can I be sure?"

"You frightened him out of a year's growth! When you began to count! Even before that, when we heard your voice, we both trembled!"

"Was it so loud as that?"

"Yes."

"It wasn't a matter of guilty consciences?"

"Certainly not. It was your voice; it was terrifyingly loud!"

He made one of his rare admissions. With all he had said about his writing, he had told me next to nothing about himself. "My voice may have been loud, but inside I was afraid. . . . Miss Mather, authors have enemies. I have enemies. That's why there's a prowler."

"Nonsense," I said. "The prowler was here before you came."

He nodded. "Perhaps he knew I was coming! Perhaps he knew I was going to buy this place before I knew it myself! Don't you believe in the supernatural? I do!"

I said, "Mr. Tinsley, if you feel that way about Taunton, for Heaven's sake move to some other village!"

He shook his head. "It wouldn't help. The prowler would move, too — if it wasn't Dula. If he's after me, he'll get me." He paused for a second, a sunburned man with grimy hands and a big voice, afraid, pathetically afraid of something he couldn't name, and which hadn't hurt either of us. "Miss Mather, I understand you go to church every Sunday."

"Yes."

"Will you swear to me — swear on whatever you hold holy — that you aren't the prowler I've heard so often?"

I had put up with his eccentricities, but there was a limit to my patience. "Mr. Tinsley," I said, "your voice is entirely too loud when you speak to me."

"It's naturally loud."

I had had enough. "Mr. Tinsley, when you came here, I took pity on your loneliness, and tried to make friends with you. Now I'm quitting. You don't like my ways: well, I don't like yours. Even if your voice is naturally loud, you should have learned to moderate it in the presence of a lady. If good manners don't tell you that, think of your nice, new false teeth! What with that continual

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booming and shouting of yours, they'll fall out of your mouth and be broken! I'm not a prowler, and I never have been, and I shall never set foot on your grounds again. Good day, Mr. Tinsley."

I turned my back on him and marched off.

I was right — don't you think so?

But I saw him once more before he died.

7

It's horrible to be burned alive!

It's the most hideous of deaths; don't you think so?

I'd hate to see even a reptile, a cobra or a rattlesnake, burned alive. I didn't like Mr. Tinsley, but I hated to see that happen to him.

Yes, I saw it happen. . . .

I saw it. . . .

I shall never forget it. . . .

It was horrible. . . .

I'd rather not talk about it. . . .

MR. INGLIS: Mr. Coroner.

THE CORONER: Mr. Inglis?

MR. INGLIS: I rise to a point of order. The lady came here, I take it, for the express purpose of telling us how the late Alastair Tinsley died.

THE CORONER: Yes.

MR. INGLIS: We have listened to her very enlightening discourse on mycology for nearly an hour by my watch. We have learned a great deal. Speaking for myself, I can say positively that I shall never eat another mushroom as long as I live.

MR. NEWMAN: That goes for me, too, Mr. Inglis!

MR. BLODGETT: And me, too! "Pleurotus broth"? She drinks it, and my wife's first cousin, Jed Hunter, as big and spry a looking fellow as ever you did see, up and died of it last winter!

MR. INGLIS: You are confusing "pleurotus" and "pleurisy," Mr. Blodgett. I am sure the two are not the same.

THE WITNESS: Not at all, Mr. Inglis.

MR. INGLIS: "Pleurotus" would come from the Greek, "pleura," "side," and "ous" or "ot," "ear," while "pleurisy" would come from . . .

MR. HUTCHINS: Pleurisy would come from getting your feet wet, and that's all there's to it.

MR. INGLIS: Then shall we regard the matter as settled? And if this little breathing-space — for such I meant it to be — has enabled the witness to recover her self-possession, she may now be able to overcome also her womanly repugnance to the horrific long enough to tell us precisely how the late Alastair Tinsley came to his untimely death.

THE WITNESS: Thank you.

MR. INGLIS: You are entirely welcome, Miss Mather.

THE WITNESS: Having overcome the said repugnance already, I shall now proceed, or, in plain English, go on.

THE CORONER: Let's.

MR. BLODGETT: Yop.

MR. INGLIS: Ah! *

8

Last Sunday night I went to bed at about half past nine.

That is later than my usual bedtime,

* In this brief, but lively colloquy, I feel that I appeared at my best. My remarks can be characterized by just one word: aplomb. E. J. I.

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but I had been doing my laundry in the brook which runs past my door, and there was so little water that it had taken me longer than I expected.

I went to sleep.

I woke suddenly, feeling that I was not alone.

I looked at my wrist-watch; it has a luminous dial.

It was a quarter past eleven.

I heard a branch snap — loudly.

I dressed. It was only a matter of seconds: a sweater, a skirt, moccasins.

I tried to open the door of the cabin quietly, but I couldn't. I pushed; a weight of some kind was leaning against it.

I said, "Who's there?" and when nobody answered, I pushed harder.

The door came open suddenly, and there was a crash as a good-sized branch which had been propped up against it slid off to one side, smashing one of my windows as it fell.

Mr. Slocum, that branch never came naturally to the place where I found it! Somebody had deliberately put it there! If it had fallen against my door, it would have waked me from the soundest sleep! And that isn't all! It was a dead elm branch, and there isn't an elm within fifty feet of my cabin!

You may be under the impression that these thoughts came to me much later, when I had had time to consider everything. If so, you're wrong, because they came in a flash while I was standing on the threshold of the cabin, with the full moon shining down on me! I'm a naturalist. I notice things. I could shut my eyes this minute and name every bush and tree in a big circle around my cabin! And I absolutely knew, even before I confirmed it the next day, that no such branch had grown nearby!

Somebody, for some reason, had tried to keep me penned up in my one room — and that somebody wasn't overly intelligent, because even with the door blocked, I could have escaped through the window.

All of that struck me, and I was afraid — terribly afraid — for while a rational human being does things for a sufficient cause, the man who had carried that branch to my door so silently that I had not heard him must have had queer mental processes, and, except for Mr. Tinsley, who was such a coward that he wouldn't stir out of his house, there was no other help in half a mile.

It was that moment that I heard a dull explosion.

It wasn't very loud, but it didn't have to be; I was a-quiver already, and I jumped a foot.

The sound came from the north — Mr. Tinsley's house; and as I looked in that direction, I saw the glow of flame lighting up the sky over the trees.

I ran — toward Tinsley's, of course — not away.

How I ran through the woods that night without breaking my neck, I can't explain; but as I said before, I know every tree, every bush, almost every stone.

I emerged from the woods, out of breath.

It would be strange if the explosion hadn't waked Mr. Tinsley.

I ran toward the house, screaming.

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The light came on, the big electric light, as tongues of fire seemed to burst out of the house everywhere.

"Mr. Tinsley!" I screamed, "Mr. Tinsley!"

"I'm here!" His booming voice came from a second-story window. "I'm here! I can't get down to the ground floor; the stairs are on fire."

"Get out of the window!" I screamed. "Lower yourself by your hands and let yourself fall! There's grass underneath!"

I looked up, but I couldn't see him at first; the smoke was thick and resinous, and the flames were beginning to lick through it. And then I saw him, silhouetted against the fire which was beginning to light up the inside of the house. I saw him, like a dancing man against a background of flame, moving here and there rapidly, purposelessly, from side to side.

"Mr. Tinsley!" I screamed.

His coolness was incredible. His voice was loud, but there was no fear in it — yet he had been so terrified at the thought of the prowler not so long ago. "I can't lower myself out of the window," he called, "the ledge is on fire already."

"Then jump! Make a running jump! Make a big jump, right through what's left of the window!"

"I hate to leave the story I just finished. Here! Catch!"

Smoke and fire again — and nothing that I could see came out of the window. Even if he had thrown out a manuscript, it would have been burned to cinders before it could have reached the ground.

"Got it?" he called.

"Yes! I got it!" I screamed back.

"Stand clear! I'm going to jump, and I don't want to land on you! Are you out of the way?"

"Yes! Yes!"

"Now I'm going to jump! Look out I don't hit you! I'm going to jump! I'm going to . . ."

I waited, knowing he would be injured by the jump, but realizing it would be better for him to break a leg or an ankle than to lose his life.

There was no jump.

"Mr. Tinsley!" I screamed. "Mr. Tinsley! Mr. Tinsley!"

There was no answer but the roar of the fire and the crash of falling timbers inside the ramshackle house. It became an inferno before my very eyes, blazing like a torch, and sending great showers of sparks high into the heavens.

Fortunately there wasn't a particle of wind, the smoke went straight up, but it was so dense that I couldn't see windows or doors — if they still existed.

"Mr. Tinsley!" I screamed again, even though I knew it was now no use.

They tell me the siren on the Town Hall blew.

I didn't hear it, the roar of the fire was deafening, and the heat had become so intense that I couldn't stay within fifty feet of the house.

The fire company came with their engine, but the brook was too low to be of any use.

They pumped some water, though I don't know where they got it, and it didn't have the least effect.

It was too late to do anything.

I guess that's all — except that when I

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passed the ruins this morning *marasmius oreades* was growing all over the lawn, and I'll have a fine mess of them for dinner.

9

THE CORONER: Anybody got any questions?

MR. BLODGETT: Did the electric light go out?

THE WITNESS: I beg your pardon?

MR. BLODGETT: That there big electric light you said Mr. Tinsley wired himself, outside his house; did it go out?

THE WITNESS: At some time during the fire, I suppose it did.

MR. BLODGETT: You didn't notice the exact time?

THE WITNESS: No. I think, but I'm not sure, that the smoke hid it before it went out.

MR. BLODGETT: It was on when you got there, you said. Now, was it burning steady, or was it flickering like, going on and off?

THE WITNESS: It was burning steadily.

MR. BLODGETT: Sure? Dead sure? Because if Mr. Tinsley done a amateur job of wiring, using cheap lamp-cord instead of BX cable, which is what the underwriters say you got to use, he might have had a short-circuit when he heard that there prowler and throwed the switch.

MR. INGLIS: I do not perceive the drift of your questioning, Mr. Blodgett.

MR. BLODGETT: You don't perceive, don't you? Well, a short-circuit like that could set a house a-fire quick as a wink, and if the light was flickering . . .

THE WITNESS: It was not flickering.

MR. BLODGETT: It's just as good to have that settled, because if there was a violation of the code, and a short-circuit touched things off, the insurance ain't no good.

MR. INGLIS: Two witnesses have testified that the house was uninsured.

MR. HUTCHINS: That's so!

MR. EASTON: Kee-rĕct!

THE CORONER: Jethro told how he tried to sell insurance . . .

MR. BLODGETT: I remember now! He tried to sell him, and he wouldn't have none! Yop! Then it was Mr. Tinsley's own funeral.

MR. INGLIS: In more senses than one, yes.

THE CORONER: Any other questions? Mr. Fenwick?

MR. FENWICK: (no answer)

THE CORONER: Steve? Bill? Tom? Seth?

MR. INGLIS: If you will permit me. . . . Miss Mather, where are you living now?

THE WITNESS: In my cabin.

MR. INGLIS: Aren't you afraid?

THE WITNESS: Of what?

MR. INGLIS: The prowler might return . . .

THE WITNESS: They say that lightning never strikes twice in the same place.

MR. BLODGETT: It don't, because the second time the place ain't there.

MR. INGLIS: The jury, having heard the witness, will draw its own conclusions.

THE WITNESS: Meaning that if I'm not afraid to continue living in my cabin, it must be because *I* set Mr. Tinsley's house on fire myself, and haven't the remotest intention of burn-

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ing up my own as well?

MR. INGLIS: You made that accusation, madam — not I.

THE WITNESS: I have admitted that I was on bad terms with Mr. Tinsley.

MR. BLODGETT: Yop!

THE WITNESS: Because I disliked his booming voice and bad manners. It's logical, therefore, that I should risk my own life, and burn him to a crisp?

MR. INGLIS: Not logical, but what woman is logical?

THE WITNESS: Thank you, Mr. Inglis. Some day you must go mushroom-hunting with me.

MR. INGLIS: God forbid!

THE WITNESS: Mr. Slocum, I may go now?

THE CORONER: Yes. . . . Miss! Don't forget your tin box!

THE WITNESS: Thank you.

MR. NEWMAN: You know what, Lee? I'd like to hear more about that there fire! I was up to Canaan, to the regular monthly meeting of the Independent Order of Red Men, and it's the only good fire I missed in thirty-five years.

MR. INGLIS: You mean "bad" fire.

THE CORONER: They both mean the same. I'd have hated to miss it myself. . . . Steve, you'll hear all about it from Hank Pruitt this afternoon. And tomorrow morning, bright and early, we'll have the prowler here, testifying, too.

MR. INGLIS: The prowler? The prowler? Did you catch him?

THE CORONER: You bet. Got him in the lock-up this minute.

THE CONSTABLE: Forgot to tell you, Lee, but he ain't.

THE CORONER: What's that, Amos? He ain't?

THE CONSTABLE: Maynard Fisk come by half an hour ago, just to pass the time of day, and he mentioned he'd escaped.

MR. INGLIS: Escaped? What blundering! What carelessness! You had him! You actually had him under lock and key, and he escaped!

THE CORONER: Makes things kind of exciting, don't it? Well, it's time for lunch.

MR. HUTCHINS: Now, there's an idea! I'm hungry.

MR. BLODGETT: I could set my teeth in a big, juicy steak — if somebody had a steak.

MR. NEWMAN: Without no mushrooms, Seth! Heh! Heh! Heh! Heh! Without no mushrooms!

MR. INGLIS: But the prowler! The escaped prowler?

THE CORONER: Ain't much we can do about him while we got victuals on our minds. A motion to adjourn is in order. . . .

COURT ADJOURNED

THE SECOND SESSION

THE CORONER: The jury will come to order. Mr. Inglis, I know you're busting to ask me a question. Well, I'll answer it before you ask it. Maynard Fisk, that's the other constable, says he seen the prowler outside the Congregational Church, trying to thumb a ride to Lakeville.

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MR. INGLIS: Ah! And he was seized?

THE CORONER: Well, not exactly. So long as he's in the lock-up, the town's got to pay for his keep. If he's escaped, he's strictly on his own. Anyhow, we won't want him to testify until tomorrow morning.

MR. INGLIS: You mean to say you let him go? Mr. Coroner, this is malfeasance in public office! This is a gross dereliction of duty! By tomorrow the prowler will be somewhere in Canada!

THE CORONER: Not at the rate he was traveling when Maynard seen him. Nope, I don't hardly think so. Maynard asked him where was he going, and he told him; and he asked him was he coming back, and he said he reckoned he was. . . . The constable will now . . .

MR. INGLIS: But this is outrageous, Mr. Slocum! He answered Fisk's questions, and Fisk believed him! Fisk took the word of a homicidal maniac!

THE CORONER: Why not? He used to be a local boy. . . . The constable will now . . .

MR. INGLIS: Mr. Coroner!

THE CORONER: Mr. Inglis, you got to quit delaying the business of this here court. The constable will show in the next witness. . . . Hello, Hank! I guess you know everybody here? Mr. Fenwick, Hank Pruitt, chief of the fire department. Mr. Inglis, Hank Pruitt, chief of . . .

MR. INGLIS: You mean Mr. Pruitt, the village contractor and builder.

THE CORONER: Well, he's testifying as chief of the fire department even if he ain't wearing his uniform. Go right ahead, Hank.

*THE ACCOUNT OF A PUBLIC-SPIRITED CITIZEN**

YOU WANT me to tell you about the fire or the fire department?

Maybe I better begin with the fire department. . .

Lee and gentlemen, the fire department is thirty-five men, counting me. It's a volunteer fire department. If you want to join up, you got to be elected. Yes, just like a club. If we like you, we vote you in — if there's less than thirty-five at the time; if we don't like you, you get blackballed.

We got to blackball fellows now and then. How would you like it if we elected a fireman that'd steal the paper off the walls of your house if he once got in it? No, I guess you wouldn't like that. Well, we wouldn't like it ourselves, and we blackball a fellow that would do

* As my remark in the folio preceding indicates, Henry Pruitt is the village builder and contractor. He is a bulky, slow-speaking man who must be nearing sixty. When I first came to Taunton, he was a carpenter, working with his own hands. By the sheer force of his ability and energy, he has made himself the largest employer of labor in these parts. No man in the village is more respected. He is a fine type of self-made Yankee, who rises far from humble beginnings. E. J. I.

Since writing the above note I have learned, to my utter amazement, that Pruitt was born in a small town in Czecho-Slovakia, and that his name is an anglicized version of an unpronounceable Czech original. Nevertheless he is a fine type of self-made Yankee. E. J. I.

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that. . . . Not that there's ever been more than one or two in the village that couldn't be trusted . . . but they'd be one or two too many if they got in the fire department.

That isn't the only reason you got to be elected before we let you join up. We want firemen that know something about houses and how they're put together: carpenters, masons, electricians, plumbers, painters, roofers — practical men, I mean. We don't want school teachers and lawyers. We like you fine, Mr. Inglis, but we'd have blackballed you if you'd ever volunteered. That goes for Mr. Fenwick, too. In the fire department you got to pull your weight, or there's no room for you.

Thirty-five men. A chief: me. A first foreman: Stuart Rudge, the painter. A first assistant foreman: Newt Hersey, the telephone man. A second foreman: Vince Hubbard, the tinsmith. We got to have all of them officers because there's a rule the truck don't leave the fire-house without there's one officer and three men on it.

When there's a fire, somebody picks up the telephone and tells the operator. The operator, she blows the sireen.* If she blows once, it's out of the fire-district. If she blows two or three blasts, it's in the fire-district. There's a telephone in the fire-house. When we hear the sireen, we run to the fire-house and ask where is the fire. The operator, she tells us. On the average, we get the truck out on the street in four to six minutes from the time the sireen blows.

We have a meeting once a month: the first Monday in the month. We talk about whatever we got on our minds, and then we play pool and cards.

The town pays seven hundred and fifty dollars a year towards the maintenance of the fire department. No, we don't get none of it for ourselves. It all goes for gas and oil and tires and upkeep and fire-helmets and hose and things like that.

When there's a fire, the fellow that has the fire most generally makes us a present. He always says we should split it up between ourselves, put it in our pockets, I mean, but we don't touch it. No, sir. We add it to the maintenance money. When we need more money than we got, we give a play or a carnival, or we take up a subscription if we think that's better, and we add the money to the maintenance money. We got two trucks now; so if there's ever a fire while one truck is out, we got another one to take care of it. We bought the second truck out of the subscription money and the maintenance money.

Every now and then somebody fixes to ask me how much salary do we get. Like I told you, we don't get a red cent. We're exempt from poll tax, and we don't pay the three-dollar Old Age Assistance Tax, but that's all there's in it for us.

And sometimes belonging to the fire department isn't just fun.

If we get our clothes ruined because we didn't have time to change, that's too bad, and we pay to have them fixed out of our own pockets.

* The court stenographer misspells the word, but the misspelling agrees with the local mispronunciation, and I have therefore not corrected it. E. J. I.

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If we risk our lives, that's too bad, also, but we do it.

Thirty-five of us — and the truck's on the street in four to six minutes from the time the sireen blows.

Not always, but on the average. . . . On the average, I mean.

2

The Tinsley fire was late at night.

The sireen began to blow at eleven twenty-three and a half P.M., Sunday night, according to the record they keep down at the telephone office, and I was asleep in bed. I guess most of the boys were asleep in bed at eleven twenty-three and a half P.M., Sunday night, like me. But I keep my pants next to my bed, with the legs tucked in my fire-boots, and I wear my socks to bed — I always put them on again Saturday night after I take my bath — and it didn't take me two shakes of a lamb's tail to jump out of bed and get my pants on and my fire-boots on, too.

The missus turned over in bed and went right back to sleep again. She's used to it, because it's happened a good many times, and she told me she'd guessed it was a pretty bad fire when she woke at six in the morning and I wasn't back and my head wasn't on the pillow.

Well, I grabbed my coat and my fire-helmet and put them on while I was running to the fire-house, and four or five of the boys got there just as I did, and we had the truck out on the street at eleven twenty-eight and a half P.M. by my watch, which was five minutes flat, and just the average of our average, and pretty good time considering it was so late Sunday night.

One of the boys picked up the telephone when he got to the fire-house and asked the telephone operator where was the fire, and she said the fire was up at Tinsley's on the mountain, and it was a bad fire and we'd see it when we got there, so Vince Hubbard, who was doing the driving, stepped on the gas hard, and we went full speed over the bumps and all, with everybody hanging on as tight as they could.

It's dangerous going over bumps fast, because when the truck goes up in the air, you go up with it, and if you haven't got a good grip on something, maybe you're not there when it comes down; but we made it all right, swaying from side to side, and I guess we had luck because we got there with no bones broken. But it wasn't the bumps I was thinking about while we were holding on as tight as we could and hoping we wouldn't get jounced off; it was the fire, because it was up on the mountain, where the town water supply don't go, and where there's no lakes at all, and where the little brook that's there isn't hardly deep enough to drown a kitten in, and I was wondering what we'd do for water if it was a bad fire like they said, and I could see it was a bad fire before we ever got near it, because I could see the fire lighting up the sky over the trees.

It was the old Starke house that was bought by a man named Tinsley, and it was burning real good.

I knew that house because once I went through it when Mrs. Townsend wanted some hand-hewn beams for a living room I was re-modeling for her; only Fred

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Starke wanted four, five times as much as they were worth, and I wouldn't let her buy them.

It was an old house, maybe seventy, eighty years old, and old lumber burns good because it's been seasoned so long. The house was built mainly out of oak and hemlock; studs, three-by-three oak; joists, hemlock; sills, oak. The floors were yellow pine, native, one and a quarter inches thick, hand-sawed. The stairs were yellow pine, native. The clapboard sheathing was white pine. The shingles were white pine. The floors had a sag of maybe five, six inches; the stairs were out of plumb.

Naturally I couldn't see that when I got there, because the fire was so hot nobody could go near the house, but I went through it once, a good many years ago, like I told you, Lee, and I remembered.

Well I looked at the little brook first thing, and you could have sucked that dry with a sponge, so we used the chemical tank, and I thought of using the booster, also, especially when Miss Mather told me there was a man in the house; but if there was a man in the house, he was done for, God have mercy on his soul, and there's a hundred and ten gallons of water in a booster tank, and I reckoned it would come in right handy saving the barn if one of them sparks that were flying up into the sky took it into its head to come down again and land on the roof of the barn.

You got to use common sense at a fire. You save life, if you can. That comes first: life. You save houses, if you can. But if the fire's got too good a start, and there's nothing you can do, you let the house burn, and if there's a man in the house, why you let him burn, also. You save what you can; only you don't throw away the lives of firemen trying to save something that you know for sure is past help.

If Tinsley had had a chance, I wouldn't have ordered one of the men in after him. No, sir!

I'd have went in after him myself, with a hose playing on me.

But the inside of the house collapsed before we got there, and Mr. Tinsley was a goner sure. The moment I saw that fire I said, "Men, we're going to save the barn — and we'll be satisfied if we save that."

Mr. Schofield, the banker from New York, joshed me about the fire department once, after that fire that burned up Mr. Atkinson's house way up on the Calkinstown Road. To hear Mr. Schofield tell it, it was funny: we saved the well; we saved the privet hedge; we saved the flower-garden and the bird-bath which was made of concrete, and the gazing-globe; we saved the incinerator back of the house, and we saved the garage, with the limousine and two other cars in it. What's more, we saved a lot of the liquor that was in the bottles in Mr. Atkinson's wine-cellar. We saved it, I mean, by pouring it down our throats, because after a fireman has risked his life to save a bottle that would be burned up excepting for him, he's got a perfect right to drink whatever's in the bottle, and it's always been like that in New England, they tell me, ever since the Pilgrim Fathers, who were the first

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refugees, landed at Plymouth Rock and began to make this country what it is. But like I told Mr. Schofield, a wooden house burns like a pile of excelsior; once they get a good head-start on you, you got to stand there and let them burn themselves out; and that's why the insurance rate is so high if you don't live right in the village, and you put your house in some place where you get lots of privacy, maybe, but where your house may be done for before we can get a line of hose laid on it. Even when there's plenty of water. . .

Well, we did get some water on the Tinsley fire — especially after it begun to die down so we could get nearer, and after the folks that drove up the mountain to see the fire got tired of standing around saying "Isn't it awful," and begun to go back home again. There must have been a couple of hundred people that came up there, and some cars from Lakeville, and Salisbury, and Millerton, and as far away as Canaan. I saw lots of folks I hadn't seen in years. There's something sociable about a fire: everybody sort of gets together and passes the time of day.

I saw you there, Lee. I saw Tom and Bill. I saw Mr. Fenwick. I didn't see you, Mr. Inglis, and you missed the best fire we had in years.

We got some water on it by and by, like I told you, emptying all the wells we could reach, and bringing the rest up the mountain a tankful at a time. While we were doing that, we kept right on wetting down the barn. There was no other house so near that it was in danger, though the fire killed most of the trees in a big circle around the house. But the main fire didn't go out while there was anything left in the house that would burn, and the truck stayed there till eight-fourteen the next morning, because it's a rule of the fire department that the truck stays till the fire is extinguished. I didn't get to have my breakfast till near nine o'clock, and I didn't have over two hours' sleep that night, from the time I got to bed until eleven twenty-three and a half, P.M., when the sireen woke me.

3

THE CORONER: Any questions? Bill, any questions?

MR. HUTCHINS: (no answer)

THE CORONER: Steve? Tom? Seth? . . . Mr. Fenwick?

MR. FENWICK: (no answer)

THE CORONER: Mr. Inglis, of course you got a question.

MR. INGLIS: None, sir.

THE WITNESS: Then I'll be going.

THE CORONER: Wait a minute, Hank . . . Before you go, I want you should tell this jury could that fire have been set a-purpose?

THE WITNESS: I heard a lot of talk about that, Lee, what with some folks saying one thing, and some saying t'other, and I can't tell you. There wasn't any smell of kerosene or gasoline when I got there; leastways, I didn't smell it, and smells like that hang on a long time. Miss Mather says she heard an explosion. That don't mean gunpowder or dynamite. If air gets hot, like it does when there's a fire, and it can't get out of wherever it is, by and by something gives way, and it may be a wall, like as

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not. I'm not saying that happened, but it might have happened. Some fires are started by exploding stoves. This wasn't. We found the stove in the ashes when we went over them careful Monday afternoon, and while one of the legs was broke, Jim Estabrook said it hadn't exploded. We were especially careful with them ashes, because we knew there was a man in the house, and the Coroner, Lee here, told me right off he'd want to sit on the body.

THE CORONER: Besides the stove, what else did you find in the ashes, Hank?

THE WITNESS: Well, the body — what was left of it.

MR. FENWICK: I am beginning to feel unwell.

THE CORONER: Skip the body, Hank. What else?

THE WITNESS: Maybe I better read from the list I wrote out like you told me. One iron bed and steel bedsprings. They were damaged, but they hadn't melted.

THE CORONER: Go on.

THE WITNESS: Stove. I said that already. Kitchen sink; put on a new trap, and it'll be as good as it ever was. There was a lift-pump next to the sink in the kitchen. We found it. We found the pipe running to the brook from the pump. Some of it stayed in the ground; some of it broke off when the kitchen dropped in the cellar. It was good wrought-iron pipe, the kind you find in old houses.

THE CORONER: I hope the jury is paying attention, because this here's important evidence.

MR. INGLIS: Meaning that the finding of certain articles might indicate arson?

THE CORONER: They might. Go on, Hank.

THE WITNESS: There was the light-bracket Mr. Tinsley put up outside the house; three-quarter-inch pipe it was. The reflector fell off on the grass outside, and all it needs is a touch of paint. There must have been an electric-light switch, but we didn't find it. We found some heavy copper wire. Guess that went to the light. There was some light copper wire; may have been more to start with, but that thin-gauge wire just shrivels up in a flame.

MR. BLODGETT: How do you know he didn't run the thin wire to the light?

THE WITNESS: Because we found the heavy wire inside the three-quarter-inch pipe that went to it, Seth, and there was a lot more of it. There were nails, bolts, two good locks, parts of door-sets, hinges, kettles, pans, broken dishes, broken china, broken glass — some melted, fire-tongs, a poker, andirons, some table-silver, a screw-driver — no handle, hammer — no handle, wire-cutting pliers. There wasn't any indoor plumbing, and we didn't find any.

MR. INGLIS: Mr. Coroner, you may consider this catalogue of *disjecti membra* exhilarating. I fail to find it so.

THE CORONER: Mr. Inglis, the county ain't paying you three dollars a day to be exhilarated. Go on, Hank.

THE WITNESS: We found a key-ring near the body — steel key-ring. The keys fitted the locks we found. Two of the keys were for the car which was in the barn.

MR. BLODGETT: Good car, Hank?

THE WITNESS: No, ratty old one.

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Worn tires. One of the tires looked as if it might blow out any minute.

THE CORONER: In the pocket of the car was a license made out in the name of Alastair Tinsley, Taunton, Connecticut.

MR. INGLIS: Neither more nor less than one would expect, Mr. Coroner.

THE CORONER: Find anything else in the cellar, Hank?

THE WITNESS: Metal — nothing bigger than a man's fist. Most of it was iron — not melted. The only copper was wire, like I told you. There was some radio parts. There was some lumps of tin. Couple of chunks of melted lead. We went through everything careful, soon as it was cool enough. We lifted out the big charred pieces which hadn't burned up. We put the little ones through a screen, a shovelful at a time. When we were through, the floor of that cellar was as clean as a whistle. We picked up a dollar and forty-one cents in change. We found a pocket-knife, bone handle, two blades.

MR. INGLIS: No watch?

THE WITNESS: I was coming to that: a pretty good one.

MR. INGLIS: How was the case engraved?

THE WITNESS: Mr. Inglis, it wasn't as good as that.

MR. INGLIS: At what hour were the hands stopped?

THE WITNESS: We never found them hands . . . though I guess we found everything else as big as a collar-button.

MR. EASTON: How many of those did you find, Hank?

THE WITNESS: Not any . . . You want that there list, Lee?

THE CORONER: Yes. Leave it lay . . . Hank, that fire might have been started by some prowler on the outside.

THE WITNESS: It might.

THE CORONER: Or it might have been started natural by a candle or a kerosene lamp on the inside.

THE WITNESS: It might.

THE CORONER: And you can't say which?

THE WITNESS: Your guess is as good as mine, probably a whole lot better. I know more about how to put out fires than about who starts them.

THE CORONER: Anybody got any more questions? . . . The witness is excused with the thanks of the Court.

MR. INGLIS: To which I, personally, wish to add my thanks, and the thanks of each and every member of the jury.

THE WITNESS: Much obliged. Well, so long, everybody.*

* I have refrained from annotating the testimony of this estimable man, though I was delighted when he scored so heavily on the obnoxious Mr. Hutchins. I was almost equally delighted when he perpetrated what, if committed by one of my students, I should have characterized as an extraordinary "boner": "She'd guessed it was a pretty bad fire," quoth he, "when she woke at six in the morning and I wasn't back and my head wasn't on the pillow."!!! The two clauses, used as they are, are captivating. What would Mrs. Pruitt have thought if he had not been back, but his head *had* been on the pillow? Would she have remarked that the village of Taunton might now boast a modern St. Denis? I doubt it.

Speaking more seriously, however, it is appropriate to mention that if I was not present at the fire which seems to have afforded entertainment to so many others, it was because of the bumpy road. When fires

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THE CORONER: The jury will come to order. The constable will show in the next witness.

THE CONSTABLE: Lee, she ain't come.

MR. BLODGETT: Lee, another woman?

THE CORONER: The widow. Mrs. Tinsley.

MR. FENWICK: Mr. Coroner, this is going to be harrowing!

THE CORONER: Wonder what's keeping her. I heard the train whistle for the crossing right on time.

MR. HUTCHINS: Jethro Dula bringing her, ain't he? . . . It'd be just like Jethro to stop on the way and show her a nice, new house she could buy real cheap — with her husband burned to death last Sunday night!

THE CORONER: The jury will come to order! Boys, we got a busy afternoon ahead of us. While we're waiting for Mrs. Tinsley, there's plenty we can do. Are you ready, Phyllis? . . . Next on the program is setting on the body.

MR. FENWICK: Great Heavens!

MR. INGLIS: Mr. Coroner . . .

THE CORONER: Mr. Inglis?

MR. INGLIS: . . . and gentlemen: since the moment which we have all dreaded has now arrived, might I ask the Court to explain to Mr. Fenwick that it is due to my consideration and thoughtfulness that he is about to view all that was mortal of the late Alastair Tinsley in the manner least likely to cause him shock?

THE CORONER: That's fair enough.

MR. INGLIS: Begin by calming yourself, Mr. Fenwick. A coroner's jury does not actually "sit" on a body. That is merely a trope, a figure of speech.

MR. FENWICK: (no answer)

MR. INGLIS: You will instantly summon to mind Shakespeare's line in *Hamlet:* "The crowner" (from which we derive our present word, "coroner") "hath on her sat." Naturally the "crowner" did nothing of the kind. He didn't sit on Ophelia. He sat on her case. He viewed her lifeless body. Is that clear?

MR. FENWICK: (no answer)

MR. BLODGETT: Go on, Mr. Inglis. Say, this is getting real interesting!

MR. INGLIS: Thank you, Mr. Blodgett. We debated, Mr. Fenwick, Mr. Slocum and I, whether it would be preferable for you to do the viewing before lunch, when the sight might spoil your appetite, or after you had eaten, when the — er — *sequelae* might be even more drastic; and we decided in favor of the latter because we agreed that you would, in any event,

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can be reached *via* the State highway, I invariably attend them, occasionally making Kodachrome photographs of them with my miniature camera. But when they are in more hazardous territory, and the roads leading there are narrow, I remain at home, explaining to my youngsters that a true humanitarian must never display too much interest in the unavoidable misfortunes of others. *Calamitas virtutis occasio est*, wrote Seneca: "Misfortune" (or "calamity") "is the opportunity" (or "provides an occasion") "for virtue" (or "good manners," or, even better, "good taste"). E. J. I.

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have had the temporary sustenance of whatever nourishment you were regularly accustomed to taking.

THE CORONER: Mr. Inglis took the words right out of my mouth, Mr. Fenwick.

MR. INGLIS: To guard against untoward developments, I have brought with me a rough-and-ready first-aid kit. It contains bicarbonate of soda, digestive tablets, and Mothersill's well-known remedy for seasickness, or *mal de mer*. Here, Mr. Fenwick.

MR. FENWICK: (no answer)

MR. INGLIS: In that little bottle you will find aromatic spirits of ammonia. The two vials contain smelling-salts, one with and one without lavender perfume.

MR. FENWICK: (no answer)

MR. INGLIS: Your hearing is unimpaired, Mr. Fenwick?

MR. FENWICK: (no answer)

THE CORONER: Okay. Now, Phyllis, show them the remains.

MR. FENWICK: What?

THE CORONER: She's got them right there.

MR. FENWICK: In that valise? That little valise? Great Heavens, Mr. Slocum, was this man Tinsley a dwarf? This is becoming too, too horrible! I shall faint! Oh, I know I shall faint!

MR. INGLIS: Do not excite yourself, Mr. Fenwick. Think rather of Ovid's celebrated lines, *Jacet ecce Tibullus, vix manet e toto parva quod urna capit:* "Lo" (or "behold") "here lies Tibullus. Out of everything" (or "out of all," or "out of all that he was," "that he was" being understood) "hardly enough remains to fill a poor" (or "small," or "pitiful") "urn." Think of those exquisite lines, and you will understand. The late Alastair Tinsley appears to have been a man of average height and bulk, even if totally bald, as Miss Mather testified. Unfortunately his remains were thoroughly calcined in the conflagration which also caused his death.

MR. FENWICK: (no answer)

MR. BLODGETT: He means they was burned to a crisp.

MR. INGLIS: "Burned" would be an understatement, Mr. Blodgett. "Calcined" was the word I used, indicating that they were converted into calcium, or a lime-like substance, and it is the only correct word. Mr. Fenwick, be a man! Try the smelling-salts — *with* the lavender. Here! . . . Er, Mr. Fenwick, as a well-bred and cultured gentleman, you are doubtless familiar with Nathaniel Hawthorne's immortal story, "Ethan Brand: A Chapter from an Abortive Romance"?

MR. HUTCHINS: Mr. Inglis, I've stood for a lot, but now I'm going to object! You ain't got no call to use language like that!

MR. INGLIS: Language like what?

MR. HUTCHINS: You know very well what language like what! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, with a young girl like Phyllis listening and taking down every word, and you a respectable married man with two innocent children!

MR. INGLIS: Mr. Hutchins, if you are by any chance referring to "An Abortive Romance," please remember that it is part of Hawthorne's title.

MR. HUTCHINS: I don't care how many titles Hawthorne had!

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THE CORONER: Mr. Inglis, you hadn't ought to make a den of iniquity out of this here courtroom.

MR. INGLIS: I *will* be heard. I *will* be heard! . . . Mr. Fenwick, in Hawthorne's famous story, you will recall that Ethan Brand, who searched for the unpardonable sin, was also . . .

THE CORONER: Better be careful what you say, Mr. Inglis!

MR. INGLIS: . . . was also calcined?

MR. HUTCHINS: Served him good and right!

MR. FENWICK: Give me the smelling-salts — without the lavender.

MR. INGLIS: So that I might do justice to a great literary masterpiece, I have gone to the trouble of copying out the exact language. If you will be patient an instant while I clean my glasses . . . .

MR. HUTCHINS: Lee, I object!

MR. BLODGETT: What for? Phyllis is over twenty-one.

MR. HUTCHINS: I object anyhow!

MR. BLODGETT: Let him read it if he wants to. I'd like to hear more about that what-do-you-may-call-it romance!

THE CORONER: You can read a mite of it, Mr. Inglis, but watch your step.

MR. INGLIS: Thank you, Mr. Slocum. Thank you, Mr. Blodgett. "Ethan Brand became a fiend."

MR. HUTCHINS: What did I tell you, Lee?

MR. INGLIS: I shall abridge slightly, Mr. Fenwick.

THE CORONER: I wouldn't do that if I was you, Mr. Inglis. I'd skip a little.

MR. INGLIS: As you wish, Mr. Coroner. "He had produced the unpardonable sin. 'What more have I to see? what more to achieve?' said Ethan Brand to himself. 'My task is done, and well done!' "

MR. HUTCHINS: D'you hear that, Lee?

THE CORONER: Better skip a little more, Mr. Inglis.

MR. INGLIS: "Starting from the log with a certain alacrity in his gait and ascending the hillock of earth that was raised against the stone circumference of the lime-kiln, he thus reached the top of the structure. It was a space of perhaps ten feet across, from edge to edge, presenting a view of the upper surface of the immense mass of broken marble with which the kiln was heaped. All these innumerable blocks and fragments of marble were red-hot and vividly on fire, sending up great spouts of blue flame, which quivered aloft and danced madly, as within a magic circle, and sank and rose again, with continual and multitudinous activity. As the lonely man bent forward over this terrible body of fire, the blasting heat smote up against his person with a breath that, it might be supposed, would have scorched and shrivelled him up in a moment." What do you think about that, Mr. Fenwick?

MR. FENWICK: (no answer)

MR. INGLIS: What do *you* think, Mr. Blodgett?

MR. BLODGETT: That fellow wouldn't have liked our New England winters! He'd have sot so near the stove you'd be expecting his clothes to catch fire any minute! I guess he was just naturally cold-blooded.

MR. INGLIS: An excellent answer, Mr. Blodgett; he was as cold as ice! "Ethan Brand stood erect, and raised his arms on high. The blue flames played upon his

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face, and imparted the wild and ghastly light which alone could have suited its expression; it was that of a fiend on the verge of plunging into his gulf of intensest torment." Then he utters an invocation, Mr. Fenwick: " 'Come, deadly element of Fire, — henceforth my familiar friend! Embrace me, as I do thee!' " and he jumps into the kiln!

MR. BLODGETT: Jumps? Then it wasn't real fire!

MR. INGLIS: It was real fire, and he jumped.

MR. BLODGETT: There's a catch to it somewhere.

MR. NEWMAN: Why would he do a fool thing like that?

MR. INGLIS: He had committed the unpardonable sin.

MR. BLODGETT: Some sin!

MR. HUTCHINS: He needn't tell us what it was, Lee!

MR. BLODGETT: Why not?

MR. INGLIS: With your permission, boys — I beg your pardon! I meant to say, "Gentlemen" — I shall now go on to the magnificent final page, describing the re-entrance of the lime-burner and his young son, Little Joe. I quote: "Little Joe's face brightened at once."

MR. HUTCHINS: There's a bloodthirsty child for you!

MR. INGLIS: " 'Dear father,' cried he, skipping cheerfully to and fro, 'that strange man is gone, and the sky and the mountains all seem glad of it!' " I condense: the lime-burner climbs to the top of the kiln. He calls his son. "So Little Joe ran up the hillock and stood by his father's side. The marble was all burnt into perfect, snow-white lime. But on its surface, in the midst of the circle, — snow-white too, and thoroughly converted into lime, — lay a human skeleton, in the attitude of a person who, after long toil, lies down to long repose."

Do you understand now, Mr. Fenwick? Then the untutored man comments, " 'It is burnt into what looks like special good lime' " — the grammatical error, the use of the adjective instead of the adverb, is his, not mine — and "So saying, the rude lime-burner lifted his pole, and letting it fall upon the skeleton, the relics of Ethan Brand were crumbled into fragments."

MR. HUTCHINS: Great jumping Jehoshaphat!

MR. BLODGETT: Is that all there is to the — er — romance, Mr. Inglis? All?

MR. INGLIS: There is much of it I did not read.

MR. BLODGETT: That's what I thought.

THE CORONER: Well, Mr. Tinsley ain't going to make special good lime, not if I know anything about lime. His bones was burned pretty clean, most of them, but there ain't nothing snow-white about them, not by a long shot! Open the bag, Phyllis. No, don't dump them out! Lay them out careful, one at a time. I'd have Doc Fairless here to testify about them, but it's the open season for pheasants now, and you know what Doc's like. He couldn't see no sense in giving up his pleasure on account of a lot of bones which are going to keep anyhow, and he gave me a list of them.

MR. INGLIS: He ought to be here to identify the bones as those of the late Alastair Tinsley.

THE CORONER: Now I ask you, Mr.

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Inglis, how could anybody do that?

Mr. Hutchins: Did Doc know Mr. Tinsley?

The Coroner: Never met him, he said; but even if he was his best friend, he wouldn't know what his bones looked like without he had X-ray eyes, and used them on him while he was alive. He must have thought of that himself. We went through them, over a couple of glasses of elderberry wine, and Doc says, "Lee, bones is bones." Well, here's the list he packed with them, and you boys can help me sort them out. "Two femurs. . . ." These are them, I guess. "One tibia . . ."

Mr. Inglis: Only one?

The Coroner: Should there be more?

Mr. Inglis: Two is the conventional number.

The Coroner: Well, if you say so, it's all right with me. "Two humeruses . . ."

Mr. Inglis: Humeri. It's Latin.

The Coroner: Maybe you know your Latin, Mr. Inglis, but I guess Doc Fairless knows his humeruses. "Two radiuses. One ulna . . ."

Mr. Inglis: One missing.

The Coroner: "Part of one fibula."

Mr. Inglis: One missing.

The Coroner: "One skull." I'd just like to hear you say there's one of *them* missing!

Mr. Hutchins: I guess that'll hold him a while, Lee! Heh! Heh! Heh!

Mr. Inglis: The lower mandible is missing.

The Coroner: What is a lower mandible?

Mr. Fenwick: The jaw-bone. It's there.

The Coroner: Thank you, Mr. Fenwick. . . . Oh, it says here, "Jaw-bone — fractured; plates badly broken. Condyles on left side burned off." What are condyles, Mr. Fenwick?

Mr. Fenwick: I don't know.

The Coroner: What are condyles, Mr. Inglis?

Mr. Inglis: Er — knuckles.

The Coroner: Knuckles — on a jaw-bone?

Mr. Inglis: *Kondylos* is a knuckle; it is also a Greek measure of length.

The Coroner: You mean you don't know. Well, I asked Doc. Condyles are the ends of bones.

Mr. Inglis: If you knew, why did you ask me?

The Coroner: Thought that word would stump you. It did. Well, the condyles on the left are missing.

Mr. Newman: If they're missing, Lee, let's skip them.

The Coroner: Right. "Innominate complete." That's this big ring here. "Left ilium: much crushed. Ribs: many fragments. Many vertebrae, including atlas. Sacrum. Sternum missing. Miscellaneous phalanges of hands and feet, carpals and metacarpals, tarsals and metatarsals, all badly burned." Do you understand that, Mr. Inglis?

Mr. Inglis: So much as a layman ought to understand, yes.

The Coroner: Then we'll go ahead. "Twenty-three false teeth, found together near the skull." Those must have been the teeth Miss Mather noticed . . . That's all. It used to be a man, with a big, booming voice, and ideas on how to write stories. Now it's a handful of bones, and a child could heft them . . . Any-

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body want to look at the bones?

MR. BLODGETT: Yop. . . . Funny hole through the end of this here bone.

MR. INGLIS: I believe a nerve passes through there. Doesn't it, Mr. Fenwick?

MR. FENWICK: (no answer)

MR. NEWMAN: Funny hole in the skull.

MR. BLODGETT: Let me see!

MR. FENWICK: The meatus of the ear. Am I right, Mr. Inglis?

MR. INGLIS: (no answer)

MR. NEWMAN: You know, I had no idea we had so many holes in our bones.

MR. HUTCHINS: I guess Tinsley didn't know, neither.

MR. EASTON: Much he cares now!

MR. NEWMAN: Look at this big hole here! Like a big, round bullet went through!

MR. INGLIS: That, Mr. Newman, is the opening through which the spinal cord enters the occiput. Am I right, Mr. Fenwick?

MR. FENWICK: Yes, sir, you are right.*

THE CONSTABLE: Lee, Jethro Dula's outside with a lady in black.

THE CORONER: It's her we've been waiting for! We'll be ready for her in a jiffy. . . . Boys, if you're through with them bones, pass them back to Phyllis. Seth, I seen you slip some of them in your pocket! Take them right out again! There ain't a-going to be no souvenirs for the jury at *my* inquests! . . . Put them in the bag, Phyllis. Mrs. Tinsley hadn't ought to see them, and we don't want to scare her if we can help it. . . . Hey, wait a minute! Pass me them teeth! I'll be wanting them. . . . Four — eight — twelve — sixteen — twenty — twenty-one. Twenty-one teeth, and I handed out twenty-three. Seth, come across with the two you swiped! Give them to me, or I'll . . .

MR. BLODGETT: Oh, all right, Lee! Here they are. . . . Don't have to get nasty about it . . .

THE CORONER: That's more like it: twenty-three. If the whole jury was like you, Seth, there wouldn't be no remains left, and there wouldn't be nothing to bury. . . .

The constable will show in the next witness.

Boys, out of respect to a brand-new widow, we will all rise till she sets. . . .

* A moral victory for me; he answered. E.J.I.

THE SENTIMENTS OF A LATELY BEREAVED WIDOW †

THE CORONER: The jury can set down. . . . Mrs. Tinsley, I want to offer you my deepest sympathy.

THE WITNESS: Thank you, Your Honor.

THE CORONER: I guess that goes for the jury, too.

MR. INGLIS: As foreman, I may assure you it does, Mrs. Tinsley. Right, Mr. Fenwick?

† I describe the witness in the tabular style I have previously used. Sex: female. Age: under thirty. Height and weight: exactly right; slim, willowy, graceful. Hair: dark; lustrous. Eyes: brown, animated, intelligent. Features: regular; exceptionally at-

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MR. FENWICK: Indeed, Mr. Inglis. Indeed, Mrs. Tinsley.

THE CORONER: None of us knowed the late Mr. Tinsley — our loss, I guess, for to hear tell of him, he must have been a mighty fine man.

THE WITNESS: He was, Your Honor.

MR. HUTCHINS: Taunton ain't never going to be the same again without him. . . .

MR. BLODGETT: One of nature's noblemen, like they say in the movies. . . .

MR. NEWMAN: A swell guy, ma'am.

THE WITNESS: Thank you, oh, thank you!

THE CORONER: He came here to get privacy, and he got it.

MR. HUTCHINS: He got too much of it, maybe. He'd be a sight better off today if he'd lived in the village, near the fire-house. We got a fine fire department, ma'am, volunteer, one hundred percent.

THE WITNESS: I am grateful for all they did. . . .

MR. HUTCHINS: But Tinsley wanted to live way up yonder on the mountain, and he done it. We didn't interfere with him. No, ma'am! Often I says to myself, "That's a dangerous place for a fellow to live, way up yonder in a shack on the mountain," but he was of age, I guess, and it wasn't for me to say nothing. This here's a free country, and New England's the freest part of it. When a man comes to Taunton, he can do anything he likes.

THE WITNESS: I know Alastair appreciated it.

MR. BLODGETT: He can do *most* anything he likes, so long as he don't break the laws.

THE CORONER: Mr. Tinsley was a mighty fine man, and I guess there ain't no law against whatever he done.

MR. BLODGETT: I wouldn't be too sure of that, Lee. He wired that there electric light, and he didn't use BX cable like the underwriters say you got to. . . .

MR. NEWMAN: The light burned off a battery current. . . .

MR. BLODGETT: What's that got to do with it?

MR. NEWMAN: Six volts, DC. Not a hundred and ten, AC, like you get out of the transformers. Now, it wouldn't do no harm to run six volts, DC, in BX cable, specially if it's juice from a big storage battery, but I ain't never heard of no law that says . . .

MR. BLODGETT: The underwriters' code . . .

THE CORONER: Order in the courtroom! Order!

THE WITNESS: Thank you, Your Honor.

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tractive. On the scale of beauty which I devised years ago, with Rodin's "La belle Heaulmière" at 0.0 and Botticelli's "Venus Rising from the Sea" (sometimes vulgarly referred to as "Venus on the Half-Shell") at 10.0, I would rate the witness at 8.6 plus. Clothing: deep mourning, with black shoes and black silk stockings. Black gloves, which she removed. Hat: black, most becoming, with black veil which she threw back when she began to speak. Jewelry: one-strand pearl necklace (probably imitation), and gold wedding ring (probably real). A charming girl, with eyelids red from weeping, my heart went out to her as she entered the room and bowed to Mr. Slocum and the jury. Amos Squire, the constable, hastened to place the chair for her, an unnecessary service for which she thanked him with a lovely but pathetic smile. E.J.I.

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THE CORONER: Mrs. Tinsley, we hate to do it, but we got to ask you some questions.

THE WITNESS: I quite understand, Your Honor.*

THE CORONER: Why did Alastair Tinsley come here? We heard one story; we'd like to hear yours. Was he planning to stay, and how long, or was he planning to go back? Did he have enemies that you know of, and if he did, who was they? Tell us everything we ought to know about him so as we can find a verdict. It'll be easier that way.

THE WITNESS: Yes. . . . If I might have a glass of water . . .

THE CORONER: Amos!

MR. FENWICK: Here are smelling-salts, Mrs. Tinsley.

THE WITNESS: Thank you, sir.

MR. FENWICK: This is without lavender; this is with. I particularly recommend the salts without the lavender.

THE WITNESS: How thoughtful of you Mr. — Mr. —

MR. FENWICK: Fenwick.

THE WITNESS: Mr. Fenwick. Thank you so much.

MR. FENWICK: I brought them for you, Mrs. Tinsley.†

* It is impossible to do justice to our little rural coroner's expression when the witness addressed him, again and again, by a title to which he had no right. I describe it as that of a pouter pigeon which has swallowed another pouter pigeon. E.J.I.

† And it was *I* who brought them for Mr. Fenwick. His act, in offering them to Mrs. Tinsley, and appropriating the credit, is one of deep-dyed ingratitude. *Hic niger est*, as Horace so well puts it: "He is black" (or "black-hearted," but *not* "a colored man," as I once heard the line rendered). E.J.I.

THE WITNESS: Thank you *again*, sir. . . . Gentlemen, I will tell you everything. I know my poor, dear husband would have wished me to do that.

THE CONSTABLE: Here's the water, ma'am.

THE WITNESS: Thank you. . . . The smelling-salts are most fragrant, Mr. Renwick.

MR. FENWICK: Fenwick.

THE WITNESS: I didn't mean to mispronounce it. . . . I will begin.

2

My name is Betty Coombe Tinsley.

I suppose you want to know how old I am? I'm twenty-eight. I was twenty-eight last April.

I am the wife of . . .

. . . . . .

I'll try to control myself. . . .

. . . . . .

I am the widow of Alastair Tinsley — the late Alastair Tinsley.

The papers all printed how old *he* was; he would have been forty-seven if he had lived just a few months longer. . . .

We led an ideally happy life together. . . .

We had been married a little more than a year — a year and one week, to be exact. We were married one year ago, late in August.

. . . . . .

We met in the most romantic fashion.

At a summer hotel . . .

Alastair went there because he liked to wander; he always wandered. I was there because I was a hard-working school teacher with nothing to do in the summer, and I was earning a little extra

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money and getting a free living out of it at the same time by thinking up ways in which the guests could amuse themselves.

I went up to Mr. Tinsley when he came out of the dining room the first night; it was my job to make the guests feel at home. I knew him because he was a new arrival, but with his bald head and his sun-tanned face he would have stood out in any crowd. I said, "My name is Betty Coombe, and I'm the hostess. Mr. Tinsley, do you sing, dance, play bridge, tennis, or golf, swim, climb mountains, or do you just want to be left alone?"

He answered, "I like to walk in the moonlight. Will you walk in the moonlight with me?"

It was embarrassing. . . .

You don't understand why?

You know what Alastair's voice was like?

Oh, I forgot — you never met him. . . .

Alastair's voice was a great, magnificent diapason, like an organ. You could hear it a block away, and when the other guests, who were standing around the lobby, overheard, they couldn't help laughing.

I laughed, too, in spite of my embarrassment, when I got over the surprise of having that tremendous volume of sound shot off into my face, like a cannon-cracker, and I said, "If I walk in the moonlight with you, sir, will you whisper sweet nothings in my ear?"

"Yes!" he said, in that great, resonant voice, and I could see the guests going into hysterics out of the corner of my eye. But I wasn't getting free board and lodging, not to mention a few dollars at the end of every week, for devoting myself to any one man.

I said, "I'm busy now, Mr. Tinsley, and you mustn't monopolize me during my working hours; but if you want to walk in the moonlight with me, perhaps I'll do it during my time off."

He said, "It's a date! When are you off duty?"

"Between nine and eleven — in the mornings!"

There was another shout of laughter from the guests, but it didn't bother him. Alastair was the most un-selfconscious man I ever met. He said, "I won't forget" — and two mornings later he came to me at exactly nine o'clock, and said, "Look, Miss Coombe, do you see the moon shining over the mountains? Will you walk in the moonlight with me?"

How can you answer a man like that?

It was broad daylight, but there was the moon, clearly visible in the sky, and Alastair had had the good sense to speak to me when nobody else was about.

I said, "A promise is a promise."

He said, "It is," and we walked into the moonlight, for the first time.

3

We talked about the subject which is most interesting to any man: himself.

He told me why he spoke so loudly. His mother, to whom he had been deeply attached, had been almost stone deaf. He had had to shout to make her hear. He shouted everything, and he did it for so many years that he couldn't break himself of the habit. . . . And then, too, everything in his life fitted in with it.

In college, he was a cheer-leader. He

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must have been a good one.

After he graduated, he worked his way to Europe on a cattleboat, acting as valet, as he liked to put it, to a herd of cows. That didn't encourage soft speaking. . . .

When he came back he worked on a ranch — where conversations were carried on at a distance of a hundred yards or so; and then as a reporter — talking against the clatter of a dozen typewriters; and between times he studied singing. But with that big, powerful voice, he was tone-deaf and couldn't carry a melody, or he might have become an opera singer. . . .

I wish I could tell you everything he did, because it was everything. He was an aviator during the War. He said that after he had been up in the air, with the roar of the motor deafening him, he naturally shouted louder than ever; but he crashed and spent Armistice Day in a hospital. They put him together again, setting his badly broken jaw,* but he lost every tooth in his head. He had to wear false teeth after that, but he still shouted.

He had business experience after the War. He told me once that he had held twelve different jobs in twelve consecutive months without finding one he liked well enough to stick to it. For some time he was a radio technician. He tried running a photographic studio, but he had to quit when his loud voice frightened children. He tried selling life insurance from door to door. He couldn't, because when he spoke, dogs attacked him. For almost a year he was press agent for a Broadway show, and it was while he was holding that job, the first at which he had ever made good, that he began writing.

You know something about him as a writer.

His first story sold — and his second — and all of them.

He wrote them quickly, and they sold just as quickly.

He liked writing; his background fitted him to be a writer. But writing forced him to be alone for hours at a time, speaking not a word, and when evening came, and he met his friends, all of the pent-up sound which another man would have spread out over an entire day had to come out in a matter of minutes!

That was how he explained it to me; it has the ring of truth, hasn't it?

Just before he turned to writing, he got married — in a hurry, the way he did everything. He tried to settle down; it didn't work. He loved his wife devotedly for six or seven months, and then she divorced him. He didn't fight the divorce; he said he didn't blame a woman who grew tired of him.

He wandered — always. He wrote incessantly. He wrote so much that he had to use half-a-dozen pen-names. With what he had been through, with his experiences — there was almost nothing he hadn't done at some time — he could spin out yarns forever, and every one he wrote suggested a dozen new ones to him.

He told me that during the first walk we ever took together. He said there were stories everywhere.

I tried him out on the spot, asking

* This agrees with the fractured condition of the lower mandible. I wonder how many — or how few — of my fellow jurors recognized the importance of this bit of evidence. E. J. I.

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him to make up a story about the moon shining in the daytime, and he did. He brought it to me, neatly typed, the next morning. Before the week was over, he had sold it.

He said, "Miss Coombe, I have another story in my head. It has to do with you."

I said "Oh!"

"Would you like to hear about it?"

"If it's as good as the story about the moonlight . . ."

"It's going to be much better."

"With a happy ending?"

"The happiest of all endings. But I don't know if it's going to be a long story or a short story. I'm going to do my best to make it short, to come to the really important episode as quickly as possible. . . ."

Even I could see what he was hinting at. . . . And though the proprietor of the hotel wasn't far away, and was overhearing every word, I don't think I minded. Mr. Tinsley had told me frankly that he had been married and divorced. That didn't stop me from admitting that I liked him — very much. I did have enough presence of mind to say, "Perhaps it would be best not to tell me the story now. Perhaps it would be best for you to write it."

He answered, "I'm not going to write it."

"You're not going to write it?"

"Heavens, no! We — you and I — are going to live it!"

I didn't say, "Mr. Tinsley — Alastair — this is so sudden!" I don't think any girl ever used language like that. But as a matter of fact, I don't remember what I did say. I saw the hotel proprietor scurrying away to leave us alone — and Alastair's story turned out to be one of a very respectable length, because I went back to my teaching for a whole year before we were married at the end of the next summer.

4

You want to know all about Alastair.

You asked me if he had enemies.

He had none.*

He didn't have the time to make enemies.

The story of his life is two words: he wrote.

When he had an idea, which was often, he locked himself up in his room and wrote.

If an idea came to him while he was away from home, he stopped where he was and wrote.

If he had a big job to do, he'd go to some quiet place, anywhere, out of the city, and write.

He didn't ask for comforts: a table, a chair, a typewriter and perfect privacy; that was all he wanted. He'd sleep on the nearest sofa or on the floor, with a blanket thrown over him.

When he saw Mr. Dula's advertisement in the paper, he said to me, "This may be what I want. It's not so far from the city, and I like that phrase, 'Uniquely combines accessibility and privacy.'" He telephoned Mr. Dula; he drove up and back in a single day; he bought on the

* Directly contradicting Tinsley's own statements, as quoted by Miss Mather: "Authors have enemies. I have enemies." E.J.I.

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spot, without a moment's hesitation, as he did everything.

I came up to hand over the check and take title. I saw the house. I thought it was insane for Mr. Tinsley to buy a place in such awful condition; but if he wanted it, and if he felt he could work there, I had no objection to his going as often as he pleased. Between jobs he would come back to see me often — very often.

He bought locks. He put them on the doors himself.

He took up shades with him. I'm sure he hung them himself.

A rolling stone, yes, but the best handy man that ever lived. He could do anything with his hands: take apart a watch and put it together again, or do carpentry better than most real carpenters. I think — I think the gentleman who criticized the way Alastair put in an electric light was probably wrong. . . .

MR. BLODGETT: The underwriters say you got to use BX.

THE WITNESS: Alastair probably knew it.

MR. BLODGETT: That goes for AC and DC — if he knowed the difference.

THE WITNESS: I am positive he did. He — he used to recite a little poem. . . . It makes me cry to remember it. . . . It was a very little poem, and the title was "AC":

> First a currant, then a fly,
> 'Neath the crust alternate lie:
> Alternating current pie. . . .

THE CORONER: The jury will come to order!

MR. BLODGETT: That there poem ain't sad — very.

THE WITNESS: Isn't it? I used to laugh at it — once. Today it's sad to me. . . . But it proves he knew what alternating current was. . . . Your Honor, you asked me how long Alastair expected to live in Taunton. The answer is he didn't expect to live here at all. He planned to come here when he had a big job to do, and when he wanted to be quite alone. He said that when he was here, he couldn't be bothered by the telephone, or by letters, or by callers, though I shielded him from them as much as I could. When he was here, he could be by himself — and write.

MR. INGLIS: I should think that a man so happily married as the late Alastair Tinsley would not have wished to be alone.

MR. FENWICK: Did the witness say they were happily married?

MR. INGLIS: She did!

MR. FENWICK: Then perhaps they were happy because they were separated often.

MR. INGLIS: I am repelled by your cynicism, sir!

THE WITNESS: Oh, but he may be right! Life with Alastair was one long series of happy reunions! He'd go away, and he'd come back; and he'd go away again, and come back again. . . .

MR. INGLIS: And you didn't worry?

THE WITNESS: Yes, sir, I did worry! I worried terribly when I thought of the ramshackle old fire-trap in which he was living — and when I thought of the way he smoked cigarettes, throwing the matches anywhere. He laughed at me. He said the eeriness of the house, the floors that sagged, the stairs that went every which way, the windows that

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rattled when he walked about, gave him the atmosphere he wanted. He wrote several ghost stories there; something new for him — and a story about a truffle hound, though I couldn't see what ghosts had to do with that — and a remarkable novelette having to do with poisonous mushrooms. I suppose he found them growing in the cellar, and studied them. He knew nothing about mushrooms when he first went to Taunton. . . .

Mr. Dula told me about the man you call the prowler on the way up from the station. We had plenty of time to talk because Mr. Dula stopped the car at what I thought would be the courtroom, but which turned out to be an empty house.

MR. HUTCHINS: What did I tell you, Lee?

THE WITNESS: Mr. Dula thought it would be so nice if I bought — if I bought the house because — because Alastair had been so — so happy here in Taunton; and he told me about — about the fire. He gave me such a vivid picture of it! And about the prowler, and he promised there wouldn't be any prowlers if I bought the house he showed me, because it was right between — between the Methodist parsonage and the fish-market. But I don't think — after what happened — I'd care — I'd care about living in this village — although it's a pretty village — and Alastair — Alastair never tired of telling me how much he — he liked it.*

*At this point the poor girl was weeping openly. My heart bled for her. Jethro Dula is a brute, and I should have met her at the station myself. E.J.I.

The prowler — I want to say emphatically that I didn't take that talk about the prowler seriously. When a man smokes all the time — like Alastair — and lives in a house which is just one mass of tinder — which will burn if he drops one match carelessly, it explains what happened. The prowler didn't set the place on fire. I'm glad — I'm so glad he escaped!

MR. INGLIS: An extraordinary sentiment, Mrs. Tinsley!

MR. FENWICK: Not at all!

MR. INGLIS: Arson, causing the death of a human being, is murder in every state in the Union.

THE WITNESS: I know it.

MR. INGLIS: If the prowler is recaptured, and if it is proved that he wilfully and intentionally burned the house in which the late Alastair Tinsley was living, no power on earth can save him. . . .

THE WITNESS: He didn't burn it, I tell you! He didn't burn it!

THE CORONER: This fellow we call "the prowler," do you know who he is?

THE WITNESS: No.

THE CORONER: Don't know his name, nor nothing about him?

THE WITNESS: No! No!

THE CORONER: Then why are you sticking up for him?

THE WITNESS: Alastair was so careless with matches — so careless — and killing a second man won't bring the first back to life. . . .

I think that's all. . . . But before I go — before I go — might I see — Alastair?

THE CORONER: Er — ahem! — didn't Jethro tell you?

THE WITNESS: Tell me? I don't under-

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stand.

THE CORONER: Maybe it would be better if you didn't see Mr. Tinsley.

THE WITNESS: Oh! . . . Oh! . . . Were the remains so mangled?

THE CORONER: You wouldn't know them.

THE WITNESS: Not — not any of them?

MR. BLODGETT: Lee, ask her don't she recognize the teeth!

THE WITNESS: They were white, pearly. They looked like real teeth.

THE CORONER: Did they look like — these?

THE WITNESS: Were those — those — Alastair's?

THE CORONER: It's for you to say, ma'am. . . . What is it, Amos? . . . The constable tells me the prowler has been arrested again. He walked into the lock-up ten minutes ago and gave himself up. . . . Let's come back to the teeth. Do these look anything like them Mr. Tinsley was wearing? . . . The court stenographer will write in the record that the witness whispered "Yes" before she fainted.

A motion to adjourn is in order.

COURT ADJOURNED

THE THIRD SESSION

THE CORONER: The jury will come to order.

MR. BLODGETT: We can't come to order, Lee; Mr. Inglis ain't here.

THE CORONER: Seeing as they learned me to count up to six a good many years ago, Seth, I noticed that right off; but the rest of the jury can come to order anyhow. Without Mr. Inglis, we got a nice, peaceful morning ahead of us.

MR. HUTCHINS: Lee, you said a mouthful!

MR. NEWMAN: He'll turn up later, like a bad penny.

THE CORONER: Not a chance.

MR. EASTON: He won't?

THE CORONER: You heard what I said the first time. . . . He ain't a-going to be here, but we're going to go right ahead without him.

MR. FENWICK: Mr. Coroner, you distress me greatly. Am I to understand that some untoward event has overtaken Mr. Inglis?

THE CORONER: Whether it overtook him, or he overtook it, deponent sayeth not, which is something I read in the law books early this morning, and you can understand what you like. Mr. Inglis ain't here, but this inquest ain't a-going to quit on account of that. The jury will come to order.

MR. HUTCHINS: Lee, if there's two bodies, we get six dollars a day instead of three!

MR. NEWMAN: Everything goes double! You get fifty cents a folio, Lee!

MR. BLODGETT: We get paid twicet as much!

MR. FENWICK: Mr. Coroner, while Mr. Inglis was no friend of mine, I consider the attitude of the jury positively ghoulish! Again I ask why Mr. Inglis is absent.

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THE CORONER: Maybe you do, Mr. Fenwick, but the law books say the coroner decides the order of evidence. The jury will come to order!

MR. FENWICK: I object! There's no quorum!

THE CORONER: Mr. Fenwick, you're getting to be near as pernickety as Mr. Inglis.

MR. FENWICK: There is no quorum, sir!

THE CORONER: I looked up that there word in the index to the laws of the state of Connecticut, and I couldn't find it. It ain't there. Section 247 says, "The coroner may, by warrant, cause a jury of six judicious men to be summoned before him," but he don't have to because he can get along without a jury any time he feels like; and the same section says, "He may order any inquest or part thereof to be held in private, in which case only the persons designated by him shall be allowed to remain in the room." Well, that makes it easy. This is an inquest, and I order this part thereof should be held in private. The constable and the court stenographer can remain in the room. Five out of the six jurors can remain in the room; but if Mr. Inglis was knocking at the door, raising a row, like he most generally was, and trying to walk in this minute, I'd send out word he ain't designated, and he can't come in.

MR. HUTCHINS: That's telling 'em, Lee!

MR. FENWICK: Mr. Slocum . . .

THE CORONER: Section 247 says furthermore and to wit, "The coroner shall instruct such jurors in their duties." For the third time I instruct the jurors to come to order, and if something ain't done about it real quick, I'm going to start fining for contempt of court, like it says under Section 255. . . .

Ah! That's more like it!

Well, boys, yesterday afternoon, after Mrs. Tinsley come to, and we found her a nice, comfortable room and bath in the Taunton Inn, I asked her what was the name of Mr. Tinsley's dentist — the fellow that made them false teeth — and she told me. Section 245 says the deceased has got to be identified by fingerprints or a photograph of the body, if it's possible, which it ain't. So Mrs. Tinsley told me the address and the telephone number of Tinsley's dentist, and I rung him up.

MR. FENWICK: Is he going to testify, Mr. Coroner?

THE CORONER: Hold your horses, Mr. Fenwick! Hold your horses! He ain't. If he was a Connecticut man, I'd have him look in, because it would be all right for a Connecticut court to pay fees, mileage, and expenses for a Connecticut witness; but he lives in New York, and I can't see handing over good Connecticut money to a dentist that don't live here, and that probably voted wrong in the last election to boot. What do you think, Bill?

MR. HUTCHINS: It's common sense, neither more nor less.

MR. NEWMAN: It stands to reason.

MR. BLODGETT: Yop.

THE CORONER: I asked him could he identify the body of Alastair Tinsley from his false teeth, and he answered he couldn't say till he seen them. There was a tricky answer for you! Goes to

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show how you got to be careful with them New Yorkers! What he wanted was I should say he should come up here, expenses paid and so much an hour for his time. He's got an office on Fifth Avenue, New York, and first thing you know he'd be putting in a bill for a whole day's work, six or eight dollars, maybe, and besides he ain't a Connecticut man, like I told you. So I says, "Doc, where do you sleep? In the room back of the office?" and he said no, he slept in an apartment he's got on another street, so I says, "Doc, you stay in that apartment tonight! Amos Squire, the constable, is going to start driving to the city with them teeth in his pocket this minute; and when he gets there, I want you should look at them and write down what you think." And before he could say he wouldn't do no such thing, I says, "That's a Court order, Doc," and I hung up.

MR. HUTCHINS: Pretty smart, Lee!

THE CORONER: Amos got to the place where the dentist lived at eight P.M. in the evening, and after the dentist looked at the teeth, he made out a statement. I mean the dentist dictated it, and he couldn't charge a cent because it didn't take him more than a half-hour or an hour or a couple of hours to go back to his office, and get out his records, and telephone his secretary, and have her sit down at the typewriter and type out what he wanted to say. Amos started back for Taunton just before midnight, but he didn't mind that because he got mileage, ten cents a mile, for driving from Taunton to the city and back, and he wishes it had been further.

The court stenographer will now read the dentist's statement into the record.

STATEMENT OF A MATHEMATICALLY-MINDED MAN

MR. AMOS SQUIRE, one of the constables of the village of Taunton, Connecticut, acting for the Hon. Lee Slocum, coroner, has handed me an envelope containing twenty-three artificial teeth. He informs me that these were found in and among human remains believed to be those of Alastair Tinsley, Esq., of Taunton, Conn., the mounts, of plastic material, having been melted and destroyed by fire. He asks me to state if the above teeth were among those which I supplied to Mr. Tinsley in a complete set of artificial dentures, containing twenty-eight teeth, which I made for him in July of this year.

The teeth submitted to me include ten anteriors and thirteen posteriors, five teeth, viz., two anteriors and three posteriors, being missing.

Cast upon the lingual surfaces of the ten anteriors is a trade-mark which I recognize at once, and which, in connection with mold-numbers found on each tooth, enables me to identify them as being of the same brand as those I furnished Mr. Tinsley. Since more than one hundred and twenty different brands of artificial teeth are to be had in the United States, the odds against such an accidental agreement are 120 to 1.

The color of both sets is shade number

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63. They are made, in the brand identified, in eleven different shades. The odds, multiplied by that factor, become 1,320 to 1.

The classification of the teeth is tapering, one of three classifications in which this brand is obtainable. The odds increase to 3,960 to 1. The form is number 6, one of seven forms in which tapering anteriors are made: odds 27,720; and the size is number 4, one of six possible sizes, odds now 166,320 to 1.

The following identities were noted with respect to the posterior teeth, which are sold to dentists separately, and which are never of the same brand as the anteriors.

The brands of both sets of posteriors are the same. About twenty different brands of posteriors are sold in this country. Carrying forward the odds already calculated, and multiplying them by the new factor, we now have 3,326,400.

The form and size (the color of the posteriors invariably being the same as that of the anteriors) are indicated by mold-numbers cast on the diatoric sides of the teeth. Since posterior teeth of this brand are made in ten mold-numbers, the odds become 33,264,000.

Finally the lack of polish on the occlusal surfaces of the teeth shows that they have been used for less than three months, which would also have been true of the dentures made by me for Mr. Tinsley. The odds may accordingly be multiplied by ten or more.

Any two sets of artificial dentures may differ from each other in brand, color, classification, form, size, and age, one series of variants applying to anterior teeth, and another briefer series to posterior teeth. Speaking mathematically, therefore, the number of possible points of difference, and the odds that two sets which agree in every one of the named details are identical, are the product of the factors enumerated, viz., approximately 300,000,000 to 1.

Respectfully submitted,

MR. NEWMAN: Approximately, he says.

MR. HUTCHINS: Betting man, ain't he? Guess he goes to the races a lot.

MR. BLODGETT: Wouldn't be surprised if he was a bookie there!

MR. FENWICK: I disagree with his mathematics. . . .

THE CORONER: What's wrong with his mathematics?

MR. FENWICK: The odds are fantastic. . . .

MR. BLODGETT: But he might take a bet! Now, if I was to put up ten cents, do you think he'd give me them odds? Of course if I won, I'd settle for less.

MR. NEWMAN: You know, Lee, I got all excited, just like listening to the radio. "Odds twenty to one! Odds fifty to one! Odds a hundred to one! He's got a clear field ahead now! . . ." And then the fool horse falls down and breaks his neck in the home-stretch!

THE CORONER: There's a postscript: "P.S. Mr. Squire should have brought me the jaws of the cadaver. I could have compared them with the molds made from them in July, and after making allowance for the destruction of the soft tissues, I might have been able to make a more positive identification of the teeth."

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MR. HUTCHINS: There's a man for you! Odds three hundred million to one, but he ain't dead sure!

MR. NEWMAN: I know that kind of fellow! When he's sure, he's sure! I'd like to hear him argue with a motorcycle cop who says he was going too fast!

MR. HUTCHINS: Or with one of them income-tax field-agents!

MR. EASTON: Or with Mr. Inglis!

THE CORONER: I was just coming to Mr. Inglis. . . . We're going to talk about Mr. Inglis next. . . . I found this here notebook on the body of Mr. Inglis at 2:15 A.M. this morning.

MR. FENWICK: On his body? Did you say on his body?

THE CORONER: On his body. . . .

MR. FENWICK: Don't tell me he's dead, Mr. Coroner!

THE CORONER: Mr. Inglis took it into his head he was going to play amateur detective last night. Something happened, and well, I guess it wasn't what he expected.

MR. FENWICK: Good Heavens! Oh, good Heavens!

MR. HUTCHINS: Lee, I thought you was joking before.

THE CORONER: When I'm joking, I'll tell you.

MR. EASTON: You know, Lee, I been reading detective stories all my life, and I been waiting all that time for a detective story in which the amateur detective gets killed. Looks like this was it!

THE CORONER: Maybe so. . . . Before this here inquest started, we agreed, Mr. Inglis and me, that Phyllis would type out the evidence every day, so's Mr. Inglis could read it over. He wanted to make notes, he said, and he promised to hand over them notes to me. But he reckoned he was going to play a trick on me, because he made his notes in shorthand, and he knew I couldn't read shorthand.

He kept a diary, too, in this notebook, and he said just what he liked in it — in shorthand — because I couldn't read that, neither.

But Phyllis, here, writes shorthand, and she writes the same kind as Mr. Inglis, and she can read his near as good as if it was her own. . . . She's read me his notes; being easygoing, I don't mind what Mr. Inglis wrote down about me. He thinks I'm none too bright; there's been lots of times when I've agreed with him, and he could have wrote that in plain English, and I wouldn't have minded, neither. But when a juror disappears in the middle of an inquest, his diary, telling where he went and what he done on his last night, is evidence, and the court stenographer will read it into the record.

Of course, Mr. Inglis would object if he was here.

Maybe it's just as well he ain't. . . .

EX EPHEMERIDE EVERARDI EXPLORATORIS

IT IS WITH feelings of satisfaction that I gaze at the superscription which I have set over these pages: *Ex ephemeride Everardi exploratoris:* "From the diary"

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(or "journal") "of Everard, the searcher" (or "examiner," or, in military parlance, "scout" or "spy").

I had the choice of many terms. *Memoria* is properly "tradition," "narrative," but in the second century, B.C., was used for "memoirs" and "diary" when pluralized. It could apply to these jottings. *Commentarius*, pluralized, is "historical narrative" usually, but can mean "notebooks," "sketches," "memoirs," "papers." *Dicta factaque* is a cumbersome circumlocution for "private memoir," though it is accurate. *Commentarii diurni* is a "journal" in Latin of the Silver Age. *Ephemeris* is a Greek word, in common use for "diary" throughout Latin of all periods, and in the second century, B.C., is specifically equated with *diarium* to mean a "diary" or a "journal." *Ephemeride*, as I use it, signifying "from the diary," is most pleasing.

I might have described myself as an *investigator*, the term which Cicero used in speaking of his private sleuths, who uncovered for him the details of Catiline's conspiracy, but *explorator*, "a searcher," which I am by nature and by inclination, allows me a happy alliteration, and I shall write at the heads of the pages which are to follow "E.E.E.E.," an abbreviation utterly secret, and under which I may express my innermost thoughts.

I pause to take stock of the situation to which I shall devote this notebook.

I am one of two intelligent men working in close collaboration with five oafs, dolts, morons, nincompoops and moderately high-grade imbeciles who answer to the names of Slocum, Hutchins, Newman, Easton, and Blodgett.

I am the foreman of a jury whose sessions are being protracted so that the coroner and Phyllis, his tow-headed daughter, who are paid by the folio for the evidence which passes through their hands, may be able to fatten their bank accounts.

When the inquest began, I counted heavily on the aid of Mr. Fenwick, who obviously has both background and culture. It has not been given, and his attitude toward me has been unfriendly. I realize that I hurt him by forcing a man of his gentle, retiring nature to serve on a coroner's jury, but like all of us, he owes a duty to the community, and I hope to make him understand that. I shall continue to be patient and forbearing with him; I shall treat him with my characteristic magnanimity.

What if he offered the smelling-salts which I had brought to court for him to the altogether lovely Mrs. Tinsley, falsely asserting that he had brought them for her? I may rise above that misdeed, though I note here, with reluctance, how openly, and with what atrociously bad taste he displayed his admiration for the beautiful young widow. Fenwick is a bachelor, I believe. He could marry; so could she. Yet no matter how greatly she attracted him, he might have shown respect for her sudden sorrow.

It is more pleasant to be able to record that Mr. Slocum, who, for all his driveling idiocy, is a practical man, treated the grief-stricken widow with proper sympathy. When she fainted upon being shown a handful of teeth, all that was

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recognizable of her late husband, he terminated the session at once, and saw to it that she was removed to a room at the Taunton Inn. I wonder if he has called to offer his further services. I wonder if I, as foreman of the jury, ought not call in person to make sure that Mrs. Tinsley is indeed comfortable and wishes for nothing. I would do so if she were not so uncommonly attractive; but Mrs. Inglis, who has thus far not stumbled upon any legitimate cause for jealousy, is a peculiar woman, and might not be sympathetic if I paid a purely professional visit to a beautiful girl young enough to be my daughter. I am aware that I might solve the problem by asking Mrs. Inglis to accompany me on such a mission, but I foresee that her presence would make the confidential exchange of information which I have in mind inconvenient if not altogether impossible. "E.E.E.E. . . ."

Under that cryptic heading I may, emulating the immortal Samuel Pepys, express the opinion that my wife is an admirable woman, but that like all other women, she would be even more admirable if she displayed less curiosity upon subjects which, to put it plainly, are my private business. When a man, even so sedate a married man as myself, realizes that his most innocent acts, a fatherly squeeze or a chaste kiss bestowed upon a comely lass, are open to misinterpretation, the temptation to proceed further becomes well-nigh irresistible. In this confidential record, never to be seen by an eye other than mine, I may set down . . .

2

THE CORONER: Skip it!
MR. BLODGETT: Aw, Lee!
THE CORONER: Skip it!

3

"E.E.E.E." I would not gratify the "Hon." Lee Slocum by telling him so, but his daughter Phyllis is an amazingly competent court stenographer. Not only are her spelling (except in the one instance previously noted) and her punctuation above criticism, but her speed and precision are extraordinary.

The first session of the jury ended at noon. When we re-assembled, at three, she handed me a completely typed transcript of the morning's testimony, carrying out the agreement her father had made with me. The second session of the jury ended at a quarter before five in the afternoon. At eight o'clock, shortly after we had left the dinner table at which I had unwillingly discussed with Mrs. Inglis and the boys such features of the case as I thought were not too grisly for their consideration, the doorbell rang, and Miss Slocum handed me, in a sealed envelope, a complete transcript of all of the remaining testimony.

For more than three hours, now, locked in my study, while the other members of my household have reluctantly gone to their respective beds, I have been reading and re-reading, annotating here and there, the record of the proceedings in which I figured so largely, and, since I may say so under "E.E.E.E.," so brilliantly.

I regret to say that I have as yet come

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to no conclusion.

The identity of the mysterious individual who has thus far been referred to only as "the prowler," remains hidden from me, though the testimony indicates that he is known not only to Mr. Slocum, but to both Amos Squire and Maynard Fisk, the town constables.

The coroner stated that "he," *i.e.*, "the prowler," had returned to the lock-up and had surrendered.

In the most unobtrusive manner I sauntered to the lock-up when the afternoon session had ended, and attempted to walk in.

I was halted by Maynard Fisk, who was seated at the door, cleaning a filthy corn-cob pipe.

I said, "Good afternoon, Maynard. Maynard, whom have you got in the lock-up?"

He scratched his head with the stem of the pipe, a deplorably unsanitary proceeding. "Well, I wouldn't rightly know, Mr. Inglis."

"Is it the prowler?"

"What prowler?"

"Is it a man or a woman?"

"Uh?"

I began to feel annoyed. "Is he being held *incommunicado?*"

"Yop, yop."

"Do you know what '*incommunicado*' means?"

"Nope, nope."

"Then why won't you let me in?" A peculiar odor came to my nostrils. I sniffed. "Maynard, since when do you sprinkle lilac perfume on your handkerchief?"

I had to repeat it twice before he understood me, and then he replied gutturally, "Couldn't do that, Mr. Inglis; nope, couldn't do that."

"Why not, Maynard?"

"'Cause I never carry no handkerchief."

"But I recognize the odor of lilac." He gave me no answer. "I smell lilac."

He lighted his corn-cob pipe deliberately, and blew a cloud of foul smoke into the air. "Uh," he remarked again.

"Did you hear what I said, Maynard?"

"Yop, yop. I'll tell Mr. Slocum, an' he'll have it 'tended to in the mornin'. You're the fust that complained about it."

"But I'm not complaining, Maynard!"

"Nope? Thought you was."

I made one last effort. "Maynard," I said kindly, "there's an inquest going on."

"Oh, sure!"

"Perhaps you're not aware that I'm foreman of the jury."

He gazed at me from deep-sunk, bovine eyes. "You are, are you?"

"I am."

"What jury?"

"The jury at the inquest."

He scratched his head again with the stem of his pipe. "What inquest?"

I gave up in disgust, and walked home.

4

Emulating the methods of the fictional character, S. Holmes, of whose exploits I have been reading with a degree of interest which has occasionally astonished me, I now resort to the science of deduction.

There are but two explanations for

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the tragedy which we are investigating in the coroner's usual leisurely fashion: either Tinsley, who was notoriously careless with matches, set the house on fire inadvertently, or it was deliberately fired by "the prowler."

If the former, it was an accident, as I stated even before the beginning of the inquest, and no motive is required. Tinsley, poor fellow, paid for his carelessness with his life — *requiescat in pace!*

If the latter, we have two different hypotheses, according to the mental stability of "the prowler," and reserving *Alpha* for the accident hypothesis, I designate the new ones as *Beta* and *Gamma*.

Beta: "The prowler" is a pyromaniac. No reasonable motive for his acts can be assigned. He starts a fire for the pleasure of seeing a house burn. He is a creature of uncontrollable impulse who cannot resist the fearful urge which drives him on.

Shall I say that there is no such monster in Taunton? Alas, the opposite is but too probable! Well do I remember the wave of arson which terrified this little village more than fifteen years ago when both the central and the valley schoolhouses went up in smoke. For months, thereafter, armed vigilantes patrolled the streets at night, and at least two further attempts at arson were frustrated. Two boys, both of foreign ancestry, were arrested. They were released when not a shred of evidence could be obtained against them.

The fires, it appeared, had been set in identical manners. An ordinary mop had been saturated in kerosene. It had been ignited, and had been thrust into a cellar window. Three buildings had caught, and two had been utterly destroyed.

I recall asking the then head of the fire department, one Elmore Thatcher, since deceased, how the *modus operandi* of the pyromaniac had been discovered, and I recall his reply, "We found a mop-handle — with the mop burned off — twicet."

I said, "Of course you had the handles examined for finger-prints?"

"The last one, yes," he had replied heavily, "an' the police found lots of 'em. They found the finger-prints of 'most all the firemen an' all the constables. They found my finger-prints. They found so many finger-prints that some of 'em must have belonged to fellers that was in the crowd that watched the fire."

"It did not occur to you," I said bitterly, "that nobody should have touched the mop-handles?"

"You mean," he had replied promptly, "we ought to left 'em where we found 'em, stickin' in the winders, so's the buildin's would burn down sure? That don't sound like sense to me."

"You don't catch my thought," I replied patiently. "Precautions should have been taken to protect possible finger-prints. One fireman, instructed in advance, should have withdrawn the mop-handles."

"If he don't find no mop-handles, what does he do?"

I refused to be led to another subject. "He should have worn gloves so that he would leave no finger-prints of his own. . ."

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"S'pose — s'pose the fire-bug wore gloves, too, an' didn't leave no finger-prints neither?"

"He wouldn't have thought of it."

"How do you know he wouldn't? The feller that set them fires thought of the mops — an' mebbe he thought of a lot more, besides. Don't forget that, Mr. Inglis!"

"What are you going to do about the two boys you arrested?"

"What can we do more'n we done? We nabbed the Eyetalian boy, Giuseppe Savarese, an' w'ile he was in the lock-up, another fire broke out. That proved he wasn't guilty."

"Certainly."

"We turned him loose, an' we pinched the German lad, Robert — Robert . . ."

"Robert Pfeffernusz. . . ."

"That's it, but I can't pronounce it. Well, w'ile he was locked up, still another fire broke out. That proved *he* didn't do it."

"Certainly," I said, with somewhat less assurance than the first time. "Er, did the two boys, by any chance, happen to know each other?"

"Any two boys that live in a village this size know each other."

"Were they good friends? Were they chums?"

"They was in the same class in school, if that's what you want to know."

"So they knew each other well, and the German boy could have set a fire while the Italian was in jail. . . ."

"Absolutely."

"And the Italian could have done the same thing while the German was locked up?"

"Yop. All you got to do is prove it. We couldn't; that's why we turned 'em loose."

I reflected, gazing at his expressionless face, that he might know more than he was telling me. I strove to put him at ease by dropping into his own vernacular. "Isn't it possible," I hazarded, "that you're barking up the wrong tree? If a schoolhouse burns, it doesn't follow that the 'fire-bug' is a schoolboy. It is far more probable that a criminal so hardened and so ingenious is a grown man."

He had shrugged his shoulders. "What's his name? Bring me the evidence, Mr. Inglis, an' I'll give you the action."

I admitted, as I walked home, that however incoherently a rural Yankee might express himself, there was almost invariably a grain of sense at the root of his reasoning. But it was for me to carry that reasoning a step farther. No adolescents would display the ingenuity at which he had hinted; but an adult pyromaniac, who might be termed *non compos mentis*, legally insane, might nevertheless bring to the execution of his ghastly tasks a shrewd mind, inexhaustible resource, and abundant patience. Have not some of the most awful crimes in history been perpetrated by deranged men who were otherwise brilliant? It is but rarely that an individual of superior intellect is, like me, completely well-balanced and normal in every respect.

5

I turn now to the next hypothesis, remarking, incidentally, how much I

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owe to the miracle of stenography. By writing in shorthand, I have filled in a few minutes more pages than I could otherwise have composed in an hour. My pencil actually records my thoughts as rapidly as they come to me, and that ability will be valuable during the activities which I have planned for this eventful night.

Gamma: "The prowler" is not a pyromaniac. He set the fire, but he had what the criminal mind would consider a reasonable motive. We may begin, therefore, by eliminating the possibility of animosity on his part toward Tinsley, for the presence of "the prowler" was reported before Tinsley bought, and we may, *a fortiori,* assume that he cherished no malice toward any particular individual. He did not wish to kill; that follows from the explosion with which the fire began, and which Miss Mather testified she heard. Why was there an explosion when it would have been easy to fire the house without making a sound, and when Tinsley would not have known of his danger until he actually smelled the smoke and heard the crackle of the flames? Clearly because "the prowler" balked at murder, and wished Tinsley to escape! Only I, it is evident, have realized the importance of this clue.

I return to the reasonable, if criminal, motive. It is odd, but there can be only one: the house was burned so that "the prowler" might discover something for which he had previously searched, but which he had not been able to find. That something must have been metal — anything else would have been destroyed by fire — and in an old house which had been occupied for many years by Fred Starke, an eccentric hermit, might not there be, hidden under a stone or behind false masonry, a secret treasure? Gold coin would survive any fire. What if the hermit had accumulated a store of double eagles, and what if some other person had suspected it?

My thoughts race almost too fast for my hurrying pencil.

Fred Starke's nephew, Ned Starke, inherited the house.

I turn back to Mr. Dula's testimony: "Fred's nephew needed cash money."

Again: "Nephew inherited. . . . Nephew's got a job in Waterbury. . . . Nephew isn't stingy."

How it all fits together! Thrifty men seldom need "cash money"; but a nephew who lives in a large city may have been squandering his substance in riotous living because he "isn't stingy," and may be urgently in want of the gold which his miserly uncle hid away so successfully that it could not be found while the house stood over it! The purchase money which Ned Starke received from Tinsley tided him over for a few months. He needed more; he knew where he might find it; he thought to find it without injuring Tinsley, who would, indeed, have escaped had he not wasted time in collecting the pages of a manuscript which he valued more highly than he did his own life.

I quote again from Mr. Dula's testimony: "Make out deed to wife: Betty Coombe Tinsley. She'd be up with certified check next day: Saturday. I said (Dula speaking), 'Make it Sunday. Owner works in Waterbury; can't get

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off to execute deed during working hours.'"

She came up on a Sunday because the new owner — the nephew — could get off on no other day. Remembering that, is it not significant, even damning, that the fire took place on a Sunday night? *And on the Sunday night* — I underline these words meaningfully — *which is followed by Labor Day, the latter a legal holiday in every state in the Union?*

"The prowler" would have had ample time to work.

He might, had he wished, have joined the men who laboriously sifted the ruins. He might, had he wished, have remained, as many in the crowd doubtless did, even after the volunteer firemen had returned to their homes! The collecting of "souvenirs" at a fire is a deplorable if universal habit in this part of New England, and, protected by the secrecy of "E.E.E.E.," I confess — *mea culpa! mea culpa!* — that I gloat over a Quarles' *Enchiridion*, bound in full leather, which I rescued at a disastrous conflagration in Salisbury many years ago. I, however, saved a choice volume which would have perished but for me, and have consistently refused to sell it since, while the scapegrace nephew would have been interested only in his personal enrichment.

What if "the prowler" now in the lock-up should turn out to be Ned Starke?

6

Another hypothesis has come to my fertile mind, and being honest with myself, I set it down.

Delta: Tinsley said (*vide* testimony of Miss Mather): "Authors have enemies. I have enemies. That's why there's a prowler."

But Mrs. Tinsley testified: "You asked me if he had enemies. He had none."

The contradiction could not be more direct (I have annotated the transcript to that effect), and since the rule, when in doubt, is to suspect everybody, I must reckon with the possibility that that charming, lovely girl is in some manner involved in the crime which we are investigating.

The proof piles up terrifyingly as I consider the situation.

"We led an ideally happy life together," she stated.

How many couples, I ask under the heading of "E.E.E.E.," actually lead such lives? How many merely make that assertion for the sake of appearances, and trust the neighbors do not overhear when their squabbles become too noisy?

"We had been married a little more than a year — a year and one week, to be exact," she told us this afternoon. But she lived in the city, and he spent most of the summer alone in Taunton. Did their marriage go on the rocks so very quickly?

When taking possession of the house for Tinsley, she said to Mr. Dula, "Oh, but I don't expect to live here." Further on, from the same testimony: "My husband . . . likes to get away in the wilderness, and be all by himself." In reply to Dula's statement, "Lots of privacy here," she declared, "What Alastair wants," and in reply to his remark, "I'll bet Mr. Tinsley is a happy man," she answered, "He might be

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happier."

"Ideally happy" — yet Tinsley "might be happier," and they parted after they had been married only ten months!

I quote my own incisive comment of this afternoon, as faithfully recorded and transcribed by Phyllis Slocum: "I should think that a man so happily married as the late Alastair Tinsley would not have wished to be alone."

Mr. Fenwick replied, with a cynicism for which I rebuked him, "Perhaps they were happy because they were separated often," but I ask now, "Were they? Were they?" If they were married "a year and one week," their first wedding anniversary must have occurred within a few days of the date of the fire. Did they spend it together, or had they already agreed to disagree?

What an ill-assorted couple they must have been, the beautiful young woman with lustrous dark hair and brown, intelligent eyes, and the aging hack-writer, nearly twenty years her senior, bald as a balloon, sunburned, with grimy hands, bad manners, a booming voice, and, for a final touch, a set of "wonderful false teeth"!

It must have been a sad awakening when love flew out at the window for little Betty Coombe, and the school teacher discovered that she was married to a hairless, toothless, mannerless brute who shouted at her, threw burning matches about, and preferred the "privacy" of the "wilderness" to her arms!

Perhaps he abused her. Perhaps he was cruel. Perhaps he kept her short of money, though he admitted to Miss Mather that he earned "a fortune." Perhaps she could stand his tyranny no longer, made her way Sunday night to the ramshackle house on the mountainside — she knew the way! — and dealt with him according to his deserts!

Little Betty Coombe, I may write these words because I know that no eye unfriendly to you will ever read them!

7

MR. HUTCHINS: Smart man, Mr. Inglis!

MR. BLODGETT: Maybe he's right! Maybe 'twas Mrs. Tinsley that done it!

MR. FENWICK: Nonsense!

MR. BLODGETT: *You*'d stick up for her! Didn't Mr. Inglis write you fell for her like a ton of brick?

MR. FENWICK: He did not!

MR. BLODGETT: Well, I seen it myself! I could see you was hard hit the moment she walked in!

THE CORONER: Order! Order in the courtroom! . . . Less noise, Mr. Fenwick! . . . The stenographer will continue. . . .

8

I am finished with the testimony.

I am finished, too, with attempting to solve a problem by a process of ratiocination conducted from the depths of an easy-chair.

The time for direct action has come.

Observation will give me the answer which thought-synthesis only suggests.

It is nearly midnight.

Without attracting attention, I have gathered together the articles which I shall require: a powerful flashlight, a magnifying glass, a steel tape, plaster of

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Paris and a vessel in which to mix it, envelopes in which to collect specimens of earth, blood, ash, or other detritus, a strong cane, and last but not least, this notebook, to which I have tied a freshly sharpened pencil.

I shall make notes on the spot, an invaluable precaution.

. . . . . .

I tip-toed out of the house, into the garage, and coasted out of my own drive unobserved.

. . . . . .

I have stopped for a moment opposite the Taunton Inn.

The lights are out.

Little Sally is having a good night's rest.

Bless her!

I shall now turn toward the east.

. . . . . .

Is her name Sally or Betty?

. . . . . .

I have not driven over these back roads in years. I make this entry while pausing at a fork, trying to decide which of two roads is the worse.

Both are muddy, due to the rain which fell last night.

Both are bad.

Mr. Dula stated that it was easy to find the Tinsley house if one turned from the good road to the bad one, and continued doing so at the forks. He did not, however, suggest what was to be done when both alternatives were bad.

. . . . . .

I shall try the left-hand road; it looks awful.

. . . . . .

It was.

It was a tribute to my skill that I turned when it came to an abrupt end without backing into a ditch.

I shall now try the right-hand road.

. . . . . .

I pause at another fork.

Vergil wrote, *Facilis descensus Averno:* "easy is the descent to hell." He did not know Connecticut.

. . . . . .

I have driven through a veritable quagmire. The clayey soil has been churned into a molasses-like paste by a hundred cars.

I did not dare stop in that sea of mud, though I could distinguish the ruins of the Tinsley house and the black bulk of the uninjured barn fairly well. Had I stopped, I should never have been able to start again. Instead I drove on until I reached a true *terra firma* several hundred feet farther on.

Before parking, I turned the car around, extinguishing its lights.

I shall walk to the scene of the fire. With my customary forethought, I have donned heavy arctics over my shoes.

The moon is hidden by clouds, and there is a fine drizzle. My trusty flashlight will guide me.

. . . . . .

On the way to the ruins I walked through clayey mud which will doubtless prove similar to that which I observed on Miss Mather's clothing.

I filled an envelope with a sample.

. . . . . .

I am now entering the ruins of the house, *i.e.*, the cellar, all that is left. Mr. Pruitt's statement was correct: the debris has been removed *in toto*, and the

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cellar, except for pools of muddy water, is clean.

. . . . . .

I have examined the cellar walls inch by inch with my flashlight, rapping on them with my cane, and hypothesis *Gamma*, *i.e.*, that a treasure might be hidden behind false masonry, is eliminated. There is no false masonry. There is no masonry whatever. The cellar, like so many others in Taunton, was blasted out of solid rock, and was roughly finished with picks and sledges. The floor, too, is mostly rock. Part of it is mud, and I have taken another sample.

. . . . . .

Emerging from the cellar, and happening to glance at the nether portion of my own attire I realized that it had been superfluous to take samples of the mud; there is plenty of it on my own trousers-legs.

. . . . . .

East of the ruins, at a distance of eleven feet, eight and one-half inches, is a huge mound of debris.

It would take me weeks to examine it.

Since Mr. Pruitt has already examined it thoroughly, it is hardly necessary for me to do so again.

. . . . . .

After having walked to the barn, which is thirty-one feet, five inches, from the southwest corner of the cellar wall, and after having walked around it, I opened the heavy door and entered the building. It is a one-story-and-loft structure, with a wooden floor thick with the dust of ages. I have collected a sample of the dust. I have rapped the floor with my cane without producing hollow sounds. It is therefore improbable that anything is buried under it, and hypothesis *Gamma* may be eliminated a second time.

In the barn is an automobile, "an old, ratty one," as I believe Mr. Pruitt described it.

As a routine step, I tried to start the engine, but there was no key in the ignition lock.

I tried to turn on the lights; they did not work.

Against the walls of the barn are rusted farm-tools of no value.

A short ladder leads up into the loft.

. . . . . .

I shall examine the loft afterward, for I have made an important discovery: near the entrance of the barn, and just outside and to the left, is a huge footprint which I have not previously observed. It is highly visible when I direct my flashlight to the northeast. That I did not see it before, in spite of its great size, is explained by the fact that the flash was naturally pointed away from the house, *i.e.*, to the southwest, when I first approached the barn.

It is a recent footprint, for it is deeper than others I saw nearer the ruins. This indicates that it was made after the rain of last night had softened the soil.

I shall make a plaster-cast of the footprint.

. . . . . .

I forgot to bring water to moisten the plaster of Paris, but I am fortunate; the drizzle has increased, and there are puddles everywhere.

. . . . . .

There are heavy clouds.

The light of the moon is almost *nil*.

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My trusty flashlight presides over my operations.

. . . . . .

While the plaster of Paris is hardening, I shall proceed around the barn again.

Perhaps there are other footprints.

. . . . . .

There are — many!

It is inconceivable that I did not notice them the first time.

The change in the direction of the light must explain it, for whereas I proceeded about the barn in a clockwise manner the first time, I have just made a counter-clockwise circumambulation.

I shall make a second plaster-cast.

. . . . . .

While mixing the plaster, I thought I heard the sound of a distant automobile engine.

I listened.

I heard nothing.

I decided it must have been the beating of my own heart.

. . . . . .

While waiting for the second cast to harden, I proceeded around the barn a third time, and found many new prints.

I am being followed!

Perhaps I did hear the sound of an automobile engine, and the occupant of the car, if he is indeed on my trail, has had time, during the intervening ten minutes, to creep stealthily across the terrain!

. . . . . .

I have entered the barn, closing the heavy door after me.

The hinges creaked loudly.

I have turned off my flashlight.

I am writing in the dark.

I shall see what I can see out of a window.

. . . . . .

I could see nothing out of the window.

. . . . . .

I heard a creak.

There is no light, but the barn door moved, I am positive!

. . . . . .

In the dark I felt my way to the ladder, and climbed silently into the loft.

. . . . . .

I am waiting, waiting in the dark.

. . . . . .

Perhaps the creak was caused by the wind — but there is no wind.

. . . . . .

The barn door has been opened.

Now it has been closed.

Both times it creaked.

. . . . . .

I hear breathing!

. . . . . .

There is no question that I hear breathing!

. . . . . .

I heard a cautious, shuffling footstep!

. . . . . .

Now I hear another!

. . . . . .

I wish I had brought a better weapon than this cane with me, but I shall give a good account of myself, never fear!

. . . . . .

Perhaps the person who is following me is armed. If he were not armed, he would not follow me so boldly.

. . . . . .

He is approaching.

. . . . . .

He must be armed.

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. . . . . .

If I turn on my flashlight, he will shoot.

. . . . . .

If I do not turn it on, he may shoot.

. . . . . .

If I speak, he will know where I am.

. . . . . .

I am watching the opening in the floor through which his head will appear . . . if I can see it when it appears.

I am as far from help as if I were — as if I were — where I am!

. . . . . .

I shall strike at his head hard — hard — when I see it — if I see it.

I hear his breathing more loudly!

There is not the faintest doubt about it.

. . . . . .

He means to kill, or he would not have followed me so silently.

. . . . . .

It is utterly dark.

And horrible!

I am alone with the monster who left the gigantic footprints, the monster who has already done one man to death: *monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum:* "an awful, hideous, huge, sightless monster!"

. . . . . .

He is nearer, much nearer!

. . . . . .

I hear a loud click!

It is the click of a revolver being cocked!

. . . . . .

MR. BLODGETT: Go on! Go on!

THE CORONER: That's all.

MR. HUTCHINS: But it can't be all!

THE CORONER: That line Phyllis read you, "The click of a revolver being cocked," is the last writing there's in Mr. Inglis's notebook.

MR. NEWMAN: Gosh, he didn't write no more because . . .

MR. HUTCHINS: Because he was shot — shot dead!

MR. EASTON: Well, like I said, I always wanted to read a detective story in which the detective got killed.

MR. FENWICK: Mr. Easton, you are heartless! . . . Mr. Coroner, was Mr. Inglis killed? Was Mr. Inglis killed, or was he only wounded?

THE CONSTABLE: Sorry to interrupt you, Lee. . . .

THE CORONER: Right away, Amos. . . . Mr. Fenwick, we'll be coming back to Mr. Inglis later. Just now we got another witness, and it's the coroner that decides the order of the evidence. By the way, boys, Mr. Inglis wrote something about the next witness. Yes! Don't forget it. . . . We're ready for him, Amos. . . . Come right in, Robert. Nice handkerchief in your coat pocket, Robert.

THE WITNESS: Pure silk. I hoped you'd notice it.

THE CORONER: Nice flower . . .

THE WITNESS: A white carnation, but very fragrant.

THE CORONER: You're wearing gloves — in this weather?

THE WITNESS: I don't like to soil my hands, Mr. Slocum.

THE CORONER: Well, I can't say I blame you. Robert, I guess you know everybody here except Mr. Fenwick? Mr. Fenwick, this is Robert — Ro-bair

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— that how you told me to pronounce it? — Ro-bair Piper. Ro-bair is one of our local boys who made good.

THE WITNESS: Thank you, Mr. Slocum. The correct pronunciation is Ro-bair Pee-pair, with the accents on the last syllables. How do you do, Mr. Fenwick?

MR. FENWICK: (no answer)

THE WITNESS: I'm very well, thank you for inquiring. Very well, indeed. I don't believe I've had the pleasure of meeting the gentleman with the bandaged hand.

THE CORONER: That's Seth Blodgett. I forget Seth didn't move to Taunton till ten, twelve years ago. Seth, I want you should know Robert Piper.

MR. BLODGETT: Pleased to meet you, Mr. Piper.

THE WITNESS: How do you do, Mr. Blodgett?

MR. BLODGETT: Not so good; but you know, Mr. Piper, I got a cousin, Stanley Piper, that lives up in Springfield, Mass. and I got a hunch . . .

THE WITNESS: We are not related, Mr. Blodgett. Everybody in Taunton knew my father, who used to run a meat market here. He was August Pfeffernusz.

MR. BLODGETT: Oh!

THE WITNESS: For obvious business reasons, I changed my name from Robert Pfeffernusz to Ro-bair Pee-pair. . . . That is more euphonious.

MR. BLODGETT: Oh, yop!

THE CORONER: Go right ahead, Ro-bair. Tell them everything they want to know.

MR. FENWICK: Mr. Coroner, why should we interrupt our discussion of Mr. Inglis, which is really important, to hear this witness?

THE CORONER: Meaning Ro-bair ain't important, Mr. Fenwick? Maybe he's a heap more important than you think. Remember what Mr. Inglis wrote about him? . . . Yes? . . . Yes? . . . And that ain't all; Ro-bair is the lad that broke out of the lock-up yesterday noon, and then broke back into it again last night. Tell them your reasons, Ro-bair; I want they should know them. And before I forget, Mr. Fenwick, Ro-bair is the fellow we arrested as the prowler. . . . Yes, the prowler. . . .

REMARKS OF LOCAL BOY WHO MADE GOOD

THANK YOU for your flattering introduction, Mr. Slocum.

Thank you for your indulgence, gentlemen.

Yes, I'm a local boy, born right here in Taunton, and I return here every now and then to visit. I have no relatives here. I was an only child, and my father went back to Germany when he had made enough money; but you know the poem, "How dear to my heart are the scenes of my childhood," and I like to see how the quaint little village is getting along. No matter how far I may rise, I shall never forget that I was born on West Main Street, where the filling station is now.

But fancy being arrested as a prowler!

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Me — a prowler! Me — arrested — again! It's all I can do to keep a straight face, and prevent myself from giggling!

Dear me!

I rather fancy that Mr. Slocum has dished up the dirt? He hasn't? He missed the chance?

Then I'll spill it myself. Why not?

A lot of water has run over the dam since; oh, a lot, and when I say a lot, I mean a lot!

And the statute of limitations in this state is five years, isn't it? Funny statute of limitations; it runs only while you live in Connecticut; but I've spent more than five years here since you know when, Mr. Slocum, and I've got the dates written down in a little book which I keep where I can get at it in a hurry if I ever need it. . . .

Well, gentlemen, meaning principally the two gentlemen I haven't had the pleasure of meeting before today, seventeen years ago I was in the lock-up in which I spent the last four nights.

Isn't it too absurd?

Isn't it ridiculous?

I could giggle!

Nothing changed in the lock-up.

Same lock-up.

Same two bunks, one upper and one lower.

Same mattresses, I dare say, probably filled with the same straw ticking.

Same pail, same washstand, same towel.

Same sleepy Maynard Fisk sitting at the door, smoking the same old corncob pipe.

Same lock on the cell-door that I picked seventeen years ago with a skeleton key I just happened to have in my pocket, but I was afraid to walk out and back then; seventeen years ago I had just turned fifteen.

Can the lightning calculators on the jury do the rest in their heads?

Seventeen plus fifteen — seven and five is twelve, put down two and carry one; one and one and one is three. Now if you haven't forgotten what you put down before, you have the answer.

Yes, gentlemen, today I'm thirty-two, and I'm a big success.

I doubt if there's any Taunton boy my age who's been more successful than I; and how does Taunton greet me when I come here on a visit? Taunton puts me in the lock-up!

Where I was before!

Same cell!

Same bunk!

Me!

Me!

And I'm Ro-bair, the hair-stylist, with the ordinary hair-dressers just envying me and wishing they were in my boots, at Baris of Paris, which is the most recherché Beauty Salon in New York!

2

For the benefit of the newer residents of Taunton on the jury, the light-complected gentleman with the heavy head of hair, and the gentleman with the bandaged hand and the stubble of beard which hasn't been shaved since Heaven knows when, I mention that seventeen years ago there was a fire in Taunton.

Believe it or not, the big schoolhouse burned down!

The big schoolhouse where Miss Springer used to switch the little boys,

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and Mr. Lemere used to pummel the big ones, even though corporal punishment is strictly forbidden by the laws of Connecticut!

Where Miss Thornton and Miss MacPhail and Miss Bates used to keep them in during recesses; they couldn't keep them in after school because they would have missed the buses!

Where Miss Tomlinson used to make even the sixteen-year-olds write on the blackboard, "I have been a bad boy. I will not be a bad boy again. I have been a bad boy. I will not be a bad boy again." The bigger the boy, the worse the punishment hurt!

Where Miss Taylor gave splendid marks, and we all loved her, but where Miss Friedrich, who didn't know anything about French, tried to teach French!

Where Miss Springer, who had the eighth grade, gave out long assignments, and if we objected, made them even longer!

Believe it or not, that big schoolhouse burned down!

The bells rang; they didn't have any siren then.

The fire-truck came.

The flames leaped sky high!

It was a terrible fire, and it had all been started by a mop doused in kerosene and pushed in through a basement window!

The fireman ran back and forth.

They pumped water, but it didn't help.

The big schoolhouse burned to the ground!

Miss Springer's room, and Mr. Lemere's room, and Miss MacPhail's room, and all the other rooms!

Even Miss Taylor's room, and she was the one nice teacher in the school!

The book room, where the extra books were kept!

The stationery closet, where paper and pens and pencils and ink were kept!

The supply closet, where brooms and dust-cloths and mops and pails and wringers were kept!

So they sent us to the schoolhouse in the valley, which wasn't so big, and we had to sit two to a desk, and I didn't like it.

Nor Joe.

Giuseppe Savarese — we called him Joe.

He was my chum, and we always sat together.

We were crowded, but we wouldn't have minded so much if they hadn't given us Miss Springer again.

We didn't like Miss Springer.

We didn't like her because she didn't like us; she said we didn't study enough; but we would have studied more if it hadn't been for Miss Springer.

If we didn't know our lessons, she punished us for not knowing them.

If we knew them, she punished us for being noisy.

Miss Springer had a long, thin nose.

She used to rap us over the knuckles with a ruler.

She used to make us stand in the corners, Joe in one corner, and me in another.

She punished us when we snapped rubber bands across the room.

And then there was another fire!

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You guessed it!

Three months after the first fire, the schoolhouse in the valley burned to the ground!

It burned even better than the big schoolhouse; it was all wood, and there was a lot of stone in the other.

It burned like a bonfire on the Fourth of July!

It was terrible, too terrible!

I ran there to watch, like everybody else. Joe stood with me, and he said, "Bert, see the flames! They go right over the treetops!"

I said, "No, they don't go over the biggest treetops. They go over the elms, and they go over the sugar-maple; but they don't go over the big white pine."

Joe — that's Giuseppe Savarese, but everybody called him Joe — said, "Yes, they do! Just look, Bert, when there's a big spout of fire when a chunk of the roof caves in again! Then the fire shoots 'way, 'way up, and it's red, and shining, and full of sparks!"

Then I saw it — over the tops of the tallest trees — just as Joe said; and it was so hot near the fire that we had to go back to the road if we wanted to sit down and watch it comfortably. And we watched until there was nothing left but the brick chimney, so hot that it hissed when the water hit it, but it didn't fall.

That was the second biggest fire in Taunton up to that time, and they said it was started by a mop doused in kerosene and pushed in through a cellar window.

Joe and I were very sorry when the schoolhouses burned down. We were afraid we wouldn't have any place where we could study, though we couldn't study even if we had wanted to, because we had left our books in the school, all except my book on Ancient History, which I liked because it had interesting pictures of the statues on the Acropolis.

One of the boys said, "Bert, I wonder who set that fire?" and I said, "I wonder, too. Joe, have you any idea who did that wicked thing?" and Joe said, "It must be the bad man who burned down the big schoolhouse first, don't you think so, Bert?" and I answered yes, I thought so.

We talked about who set those fires, because we wanted to study, I and Joe, and we never did find out.

But today I'm a crackerjack stylist of coiffures, making scads of money, what with tips and the biggest commissions of any artist in my line, and I should worry about what happened in a funny little village seventeen years ago when I was nothing but a kid.

I could giggle.

3

The night of that second fire they arrested Joe — we called him Joe, but his name was Giuseppe Savarese.

Do you want to know why they arrested Joe?

Miss Springer — sure, it had to be that old Miss Springer — walked around while the schoolhouse in the valley was burning, making believe she was talking to everybody.

But that wasn't what she was really after!

She was smelling with her long, thin nose, smelling the hands of all the boys and girls, and when she came to Joe,

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she sniffed and said, "Joe, come along with me a minute. I want to talk to you."

Joe was scared, and he didn't want to go with her, and Joe wasn't very bright, being over seventeen and only in the eighth grade, so I said, "Miss Springer, what do you want with Joe?"

She snapped, "None of your business, Bert! None of your business! I want Joe to talk to Chief Thatcher."

Mr. Thatcher was the chief of the fire department.

I said, "Miss Springer, can't you see that the chief is busy?"

She said, "He won't be too busy to talk to Joe. I want him to smell the kerosene on Joe's hands."

She was holding Joe by one arm, and Joe shook her off; he was bigger than Miss Springer, and before you could say "Jiminy crickets," he was way out of sight, running up the road, and Miss Springer was so funny, with her big mouth going open and shut, like a fish, and her long, thin nose in the middle of her face, that it was all I could do to keep from giggling.

They arrested Joe that same night.

They found him in the bathtub in Mr. Savarese's house, and Mrs. Savarese was scrubbing him because it was Saturday night and Joe needed a bath. Miss Springer tried to walk right into the bathroom, and Mr. Saverese wouldn't let her do that; but Chief Thatcher walked in, even though Joe was naked and didn't have a stitch on him, and Chief Thatcher said, "Hello, Joe! Let me smell your hands."

Miss Springer had put him up to that, you can bet.

Joe told me he said, "Sure, Chief! Smell 'em! Smell 'em all you like," and Chief Thatcher smelled them and said, "What have you been scrubbing him with, Mrs. Savarese? Carbolic acid?" and she couldn't answer because she never learned to speak more than a couple of words in English; but Joe said, "There was a cut on my hand, see, and I put some disinfectant on it, see, and I guess I spilled the rest of the disinfectant on the other hand. I didn't mean to spill it, but the bottle was slippery, and it spilled all over. See?"

Chief Thatcher said, "Joe, that's pretty cute. Get dressed, and come along with me." That's what Joe told me he said.

Joe said his mother tried to claw Chief Thatcher when he said that — she could understand English even if she couldn't speak it — and his old man got mad, too, but they took Joe to the lock-up.

Joe, who was as innocent as a newborn baby!

Joe, who was such a big boy that they had to promote him out of the sixth grade, where he belonged, but who didn't smoke, or drink, or chew tobacco, or do any of the bad things you'd expect of a big boy!

Joe, who loved animals so much that he gave his kitten the milk his mother bought for his little sister!

They kept Joe in the lock-up for a couple of weeks on what they called an open charge while the rest of the school was split up between the Casino and the Congregational Church and all the other churches.

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There wasn't any one place that had enough rooms for all the boys and girls, and my class was in the Congregationalist Church, where there were plenty of chairs but no desks, though there was a platform where Mr. Lemere could stand, if he wanted to, and shoot off his big mouth at the morning assemblies just as he used to in the regular schoolhouses.

I didn't bear any grudge against Miss Springer, with her long nose which she kept sticking into other people's business. Some teachers are like that, and Miss Springer was born that way, I think.

I said, "Yes, ma'am," and "Yes, ma'am," knowing all the time that she was watching me like a hawk; and she gave me better marks: sixties when they should have been eighties, and eighties when they should have been hundreds.

I worked hard, because I realized how important it was for a boy to go to school and get a good education.

Where would I be today without education?

When I give a permanent wave to one of my customers, I can explain that I wouldn't dream of using a lotion which has those vile, strong chemicals in it: no borax, no lye, no ammonia, no potash, even though they would make my work easier.

Ladies' scalps are tighter today because they are so nervous. They don't have to tell me when things aren't going well at home; I know it the moment I run my fingers through their hair. That's why I believe in an oil treatment first of all; it's so relaxing to their scalps. After that, an oil permanent wave — three inches deep — with a special lanolin-base cream which I invented myself in which I bake the curls.

I tell the ladies that, and they say, "Oh, Ro-bair, you're so wonderful!" — which I am, because they look ten years younger when I'm through with them — and then they wouldn't dream of tipping me anything smaller than folding money, besides which I wouldn't soil my hands taking quarters or even half dollars.

That's what education gets you; ordinary hair-dressers wouldn't know the difference between lye and potash, though one of my customers who is a graduate chemist told me there isn't any difference, and I said, "Madame is always right," though between us, gentlemen, I knew she was talking through her hat.

But I've always been a believer in education, so I did my best, even though I missed Joe, who wasn't getting any education at all. And you could have knocked me over with a feather one Saturday night when my father came rushing into the room where I was studying my lessons, yelling, "Mein Gott! Mein Gott! Fire!"

I said, "Where's the fire?" and when he said, "Der Congregational Church," I couldn't believe my ears, I was so surprised!

Really, I didn't believe it!

My father said, "Put down that book und come und help put der fire oud," but I said, "Pa, I haven't finished the history assignment which Miss Springer gave me, and besides I might catch my death of cold going out on a raw night like this."

I didn't want to go, but he insisted, so

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I went, though I didn't even cross the street to the church. They didn't need help because it was just a little fire — they put it out very quickly — and the next morning they turned Joe loose — he couldn't have set the fire while he was locked up — and they put *me* in the clink.

4

They smelled my hands.

They smelled all right.

I smelled them myself, and they smelled fine — like a couple of flowers.

They asked Pa questions, and then they asked me questions, but Pa, who was pretty near as bright as I was, said, "Don't say nuttin'! No matter what dey ask you, '*halt's maul*'!"

In German that means "shut your trap."

It's very vulgar German, but what would you expect of Pa, who ran a meat market?

And that's what I did: I said nothing.

They asked, "What's your name?" and I giggled; and they asked, "Where do you live?" and I giggled; and they asked, "Where are the two mops that used to be in your father's store?" and I giggled some more.

I had a fine time; I just giggled.

They knew I didn't like Miss Springer, and when they brought her to the lock-up, and she said, "Bert, I know you don't like me, but you wouldn't try to burn down a church because of that?" I giggled, and she went on, "If I thought that, I'd resign tomorrow, Bert! I'd resign, and I'd go far, far away from here!"

I felt like telling her she couldn't go too far to suit me, but I didn't want to start talking, because when a boy does that it's hard for him to stop, and sometimes they get him to say things that aren't true. I just listened to her, watching her long, thin nose going from side to side with the tears running down it, and I wonder what I'd do if she came into Baris of Paris today and asked for a treatment and a shampoo. I wouldn't wait on her, of course, because I don't do that ordinary work, and anyway if you want to see me, you have to make an appointment in advance. I'm so busy that I just take care of my regular customers; and if I don't like a lady, and don't think she'll do my art credit, I turn her over to Charles, or Harry, or Auguste, or Frederick, who are just ordinary operators, and there's nothing she can do about it. I'm the stylist, and the others are not artists.

But just the idea of getting my fingers into Miss Springer's iron-gray hair gives me ideas. I wonder what it would look like if some bad man — the same bad man that burned the schoolhouses — doused it with kerosene, and then dropped a match into it!

I could giggle!

That was seventeen years ago, and while I was just a boy, you can see I had pretty good sense.

I knew when to shut up.

I could hold my tongue and make believe I was dumb!

Funny statute of limitations in Connecticut: Section 6559 says you have to be prosecuted within five years, but the time that you don't live in the state

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doesn't count.

Well, I lived in Connecticut five years, three months, and twelve days after that, so I can say what I like now, and I won't be misunderstood.

I've got it all written down, though I wouldn't have read up the law, gentlemen, if they hadn't made baseless accusations against me when I was just a boy, and hardly old enough to know what it was all about.

Of course they had to let me go when the boarding-house where Miss Springer lived caught fire — yes, a mop doused in kerosene there, too — though they found the fire in time and put it right out; but it frightened them because there were people sleeping in the house and they might have been hurt, and when I went back to school I was in Miss Taylor's class, and she gave good marks, and I liked her, and Miss Springer had just disappeared. She went to St. Louis, or New Orleans, or some place like that, though I never did find out exactly. Maybe she went on teaching, though it wouldn't be easy for a teacher with a record like that to get another job. Maybe she's dead.

I could giggle!

And that's how I knew what the lock-up was like even before they put me in it again, and this time I wasn't afraid to pick the silly old lock and come and go as I pleased.

The coroner told me he'd want me to testify. Well, I didn't mind; I'm always on the side of justice, but I wouldn't think of appearing before you gentlemen unshaven and unmanicured. Maybe the juror with the bandaged hand can get away with that without being criticized, but then he isn't Ro-bair, the stylist at Baris of Paris.

I thumbed a ride to Lakeville.

I got a shave.

I got a good hair-cut; not that I needed it, but it made me look neater.

I got a facial, a shampoo, and a sun-lamp treatment.

I got my nails manicured — see?

I tipped the barber and the manicure — the way you gentlemen ought to tip them. They almost dropped dead.

I bought a bottle of lilac toilet-water to brace my skin; my skin is very sensitive.

I bought a mirror and some cream, so that I could shave myself again in the clink.

I came back to Taunton, and I broke into my cell.

I tried to make it look homey.

I hung up a little framed picture I had bought in Lakeville.

I hung up the mirror.

I put my toothbrush on the washstand in a nice, thin glass which I had bought for it.

I put a vase of mixed flowers, asters and chrysanthemums, with just a little gypsophila, at the window.

I gave sleepy old Maynard Fisk a bag of cheap tobacco, and he allowed that was fair enough.

Run away while my name is under a cloud?

Not me!

5

You want to know what I think of the Tinsley fire.

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I was interested because it was a good fire, though not as good as some I've seen.

I was interested because I knew Mrs. Tinsley, a charming lady and one of my good customers.

But I'm not the prowler!

Positively not!

The coroner had me arrested the moment he saw me.

I didn't make a fuss about it; it's a risk I take every time I come to Taunton.

Once you give a boy a bad reputation, there's absolutely nothing he can do about it. Even if he was innocent, like me, everybody remembers, and things have come to such a pass that I can't watch a fire here, like everybody else, without somebody misinterpreting it.

But I was prepared!

Did you call up Baris of Paris, as I told you, Mr. Slocum, and ask him where I was on the dates you mentioned? The dates on which the prowler was prowling? You did?

I rather fancied you would.

Not many a man can answer the question, "Where were you on the night of September fifth, at six-thirty in the evening?" or "Where were you on the night of October twenty-second, at about nine P.M.?" but I can!

If I can't, Baris can answer for me!

He'll tell you that Mrs. So-and-So was going to give a big dinner in her duplex apartment on Fifth Avenue, and I was seeing to it that her hair was right; or he'll tell you that Marjorie Who's This was going to make her début, and I was making sure that her coiffure had plenty of glamor.

I'm like a public character; when I go somewhere, everybody knows it. The other ladies who are disappointed know it, but I tell them, "Ladies, ladies, I have my clientele, and it's my motto to keep my old customers young."

Like Mrs. Tinsley, one of my good customers.

But what's that got to do with the fire?

I was there, yes.

Being on my vacation, and being in Taunton, I took it in. What could be more natural?

But it was burning when I got there!

It was burning terribly!

The flames were shooting high into the heavens, making a most artistic picture, a picture which was at once majestic and beautiful and awful; but while the fire may or may not have been a case of incendiarism, a subject on which I have no opinion one way or the other, I have a perfect alibi.

Did you check up, Mr. Slocum?

I hoped so.

Well, then, gentlemen of the jury, at the moment the fire broke out at Tinsley's, I was walking on Main Street, Taunton, a distance of five miles along the shortest road!

That sounds fishy, doesn't it?

But I can prove it, and Mr. Slocum will back me up.

I went to the fire — of course.

I wanted to see it for myself.

But I went there in good company!

Mr. Slocum has investigated, and Mr. Slocum will assure the jury that I am telling no more and no less than the exact truth when I say that I was one of the seven men who rode there on the fire-

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truck! Vince Hubbard was driving, and I said, "Hello, Vince!" Hank Pruitt was holding on next to me, and I said, "Hello, Mr. Pruitt!" Jim Estabrook — Mr. Slocum's brother-in-law, was holding on at my other side, and I said, "Hello, Jim!" and he said, "Why, if it ain't Bert!" and I answered, "Call me 'Ro-bair,' please."

I will grant I had no business on the fire-truck, not being a member of the volunteer fire company; but I jumped on it when it started from the fire-house, and they couldn't very well push me off while it was bumping and swerving along the back roads at forty miles an hour.

I ask you, could they do that?

Don't make me giggle!

Did you talk to Vince? . . . and Mr. Pruitt? . . . and Jim Estabrook? All three?

They remembered me, didn't they?

I fancied they would.

Are you going to let me go?

Or do I have to get a writ of *habeas corpus* and sue you for false arrest after that? I'd hate to bring suit, for after all, I'm a somebody — stylist at Baris of Paris — and it would bring me the wrong kind of publicity.

Am I free to go where I please?

As free as a bird?

Gentlemen of the jury, I trust I have not bored you.

THE CORONER: Couple of questions, Bert — I mean, Ro-bair.

THE WITNESS: I am always on the side of justice, Mr. Slocum.

THE CORONER: While it ain't got nothing to do with this here inquest, you said the big schoolhouse was fired by a mop doused in kerosene and pushed in through a basement window. Now, I didn't know that. How did you know it?

THE WITNESS: Did I make a remark to such an effect, Mr. Slocum?

THE CORONER: We all heard it. Phyllis'll read it back to you if you want.

THE WITNESS: Phyllis need not go to the trouble. I'll take your word.

THE CORONER: You said it.

THE WITNESS: If you say I did . . . I won't argue. I was repeating gossip which I heard seventeen years ago.

THE CORONER: You had good ears if you heard that there gossip. We was all trying to figure out what started the first fire, and we didn't suspicion till we found a mop-handle after the third. I guess we wasn't any too intelligent.

THE WITNESS: Do you expect me to differ with that statement, Mr. Slocum?

THE CORONER: Nope; it's one of the subjects on which we agree.

THE WITNESS: I could giggle!

THE CORONER: Don't. There's been a lot of water over the dam since, like you said, and the statute of limitations has been working, too. Any pow-wow we have about old times is just friendly and sociable-like. . . . I now show you a gadget they found in your pocket after the Tinsley fire.

THE WITNESS: A radio microphone, yes. I didn't steal it. I found it under a clump of sumac on the road near Tinsley's. Yes, exactly as it is, with those short, broken wires dangling from it. I took it along as a souvenir.

THE CORONER: They take souvenirs at fires, I've heard tell.

THE WITNESS: Well, why not?

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MR. BLODGETT: Let me see that there mike. . . . It ain't a regular mike like they got in the broadcasting stations. It's one of them toy mikes they sell you for a dollar extra when you buy a set so's you can plug it in and amuse the children. That's all it's good for.

MR. HUTCHINS: Is that what it is? Then how come he found it at Tinsley's?

MR. BLODGETT: He didn't say he found it at Tinsley's. He said he found it along the road near Tinsley's.

THE WITNESS: That is right.

MR. BLODGETT: Well, it's in good shape and there ain't no mud in it; so some youngster in the crowd had it in his pocket on the night of the fire. It dropped through a hole in the pocket, I guess.

THE CORONER: Any other questions, boys?

MR. NEWMAN: Yep . . . Bert — Robert — you said you knowed Mrs. Tinsley.

THE WITNESS: A good customer, sir. My heart bleeds for her in her loss.

MR. NEWMAN: Nice woman, ain't she?

THE WITNESS: One of the nicest! The type I like most to work on. It isn't every woman that has such a cascade of fiery, red hair.

MR. HUTCHINS: Wait a minute, Robert! Wait a minute! . . . Red hair, did you say?

THE WITNESS: Red! The real, blazing red! Like fire!

MR. HUTCHINS: You ain't color-blind or something, are you? She testified before us yesterday . . .

MR. BLODGETT: Yop! She did!

MR. HUTCHINS: . . . and if her hair's red, then mine's green!

THE CORONER: Don't fight about it, boys! Don't fight about it! There's many a woman whose hair is one color one day and another the next.

THE WITNESS: But not Mrs. Tinsley! She was so proud of her red hair, and it was so much admired in café society . . .

MR. BLODGETT: Café society? What's that?

THE CORONER: You wouldn't understand, Seth, but I know what he's talking about. I was took to one of them cafés in New York once. First the fellow that was treating me had to give a waiter half of his bankroll to let us in, and then he had to give another waiter the other half to let us out.

MR. NEWMAN: Robert, I ain't asked you the question I got on my mind yet. You knowed Mrs. Tinsley. Did she love Mr. Tinsley?

THE WITNESS: Does a woman love a man who gives her one-third of his earnings? And such earnings? I could giggle!

THE CORONER: Any more questions? . . .

THE WITNESS: I am free to go, Mr. Slocum?

THE CORONER: So long as you get out of town before there's any more fires, yes.

THE WITNESS: I shall not condescend to answer your insinuation, Mr. Slocum! It is unworthy of you! . . . You may tell Maynard Fisk that I leave the contents of my cell in his care. The stems of the flowers should be clipped daily. . . . Good day, gentlemen. Mr. Fenwick, you look like the only juryman civilized enough to have a fashionable wife. If so, tell her of Baris of Paris.

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6

THE CORONER: The jury will come to order. Amos, open the windows so the room gets a good airing. It needs it. . . . Ro-bair don't know it, but he'll be followed by a plain-clothes man wherever he goes. If there was a prowler, it was him.

MR. FENWICK: I don't believe it!

THE CORONER: If somebody tried to burn the house down with Mr. Tinsley in it, it was him.

MR. FENWICK: I don't believe that, either!

THE CORONER: When we're through here, our evidence goes to the district attorney. If it proves Ro-bair committed arson — and killed a man while he was doing it — he'll go to the electric chair at Wethersfield, and there ain't no power on earth that can save him.

MR. FENWICK: He had an alibi!

THE CORONER: Would he have had it so pat if he hadn't known long before he was going to need it?

MR. FENWICK: Nevertheless, I don't believe he's guilty.

THE CORONER: Mr. Fenwick, it does you credit to feel like that for one of your fellow creatures, but the law is the law, and it don't aim to let no guilty man escape. . . . Well, boys, it's getting near lunch-time, and ever since Phyllis whispered there's liver and bacon waiting for me, I've been wanting to adjourn. But first the Court will say a few words about Mr. Inglis and his notebook.

MR. FENWICK: If — if — it should be shown that the burning of the house led directly to the death of Mr. Inglis; if — if . . .

THE CORONER: Don't put yourself out about it, Mr. Fenwick; they won't electrocute Ro-bair twice. If they do, the second time it won't hurt.

MR. FENWICK: Mr. Coroner, the subject is hardly one to be treated as a joke. While it is clear that Robert — Ro-bair — committed arson as a boy, it is equally clear that he had nothing to do with the Tinsley fire. . . . If you would return to the question of Mr. Inglis . . .

THE CORONER: Yep . . .

It's funny that a smart man like Mr. Inglis could write so much and think so little.

Did you ever see a fool cat chasing its own tail?

Going round and round and round, and catching up with it every once in a while?

Biting it, and getting madder and madder when it hurts?

That's the story of Mr. Inglis.

First he went through the ruins and couldn't find nothing; we'd been through them first.

Then he went to the barn and when he couldn't start the car he tried to turn on the lights. Well, it would have been a nine days' wonder if he could have done that, because there wasn't no battery.

Then he looked out of the doorway and he seen a footprint he didn't recognize. It was a big footprint, and he'd never made one that big in his life — no — but he made it all right when he wore his galoshes over his shoes on account of the rain and the mud like he done last night.

He made a plaster-cast of that there

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footprint.

This is it.

It agrees with his galoshes; I compared them.

Then he walked around the barn again — while the plaster was setting — and there was prints he hadn't seen before.

True enough; the prints he made on his first trip!

He made another plaster-cast.

This is it.

Seth, you better take a good look at the wires that got caught in the plaster, and that came out of the ground along with it. Take an extra good look, because this afternoon we'll be wanting to hear what you got to say about them.

Mr. Inglis thought he heard an automobile engine.

He did.

He thought he was being followed.

He was right.

There was a fellow that was going to Tinsley's himself that night, hunting for something he was dead sure was there.

Yep, he found it . . .

But he seen somebody that was working with a flashlight, and he was just curious enough to want to know what he was doing.

He heard somebody going round the barn — Mr. Inglis on his third trip, never making a sound, he thought, but with his galoshes going "Clip, clop, clop, clip," every time he lifted them out of the mud — and he wanted to know about that.

He heard somebody climbing the ladder that went up into the loft — it creaked every step — though he didn't suspicion even then who it was nor why he was acting that-a-way.

MR. BLODGETT: The fellow was you, Lee?

THE CORONER: Right the first guess! I seen Mr. Inglis, but it wasn't light enough for me to know it was him, and I wanted to know what was he up to.

MR. BLODGETT: You found out. . . .

THE CORONER: That's the coroner's business. . . .

MR. FENWICK: But, my God, Mr. Slocum, my God, you didn't have to shoot Mr. Inglis!

THE CORONER: Mr. Fenwick, that's been laying on my conscience heavy ever since. I didn't shoot him. I didn't cock a revolver and point it at him. Hell, I don't carry no revolver, and never have! But there was a click all right, a real sharp, loud click, like Mrs. Slocum's been telling me for nigh on to thirty years. There was a loud click, and though Mr. Inglis had heard it before, and had wrote what he thought about it in his diary, when he heard it last night he fainted dead away. But what's a man going to do when he's been chawing tobacco, and his mouth is full of tobacco juice, and all of a sudden he's got to spit?

Let's adjourn and think it over.

COURT ADJOURNED

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THE CORONER: Steve, give Mr. Inglis a hand so's he don't fall.

MR. INGLIS: Thank you, Mr. Newman.

THE CORONER: Seth, put that there cushion I brought in Mr. Inglis's chair. That's right.

MR. INGLIS: Thank you, Mr. Blodgett.

THE CORONER: Comfortable, Mr. Inglis? The jury will come to order.

MR. INGLIS: It can't; there's no quorum.

THE CORONER: So that's how you thank me for the cushion? I guess you ain't so sick as I thought you was.

MR. INGLIS: The flesh may be weak, but the spirit is willing.

THE CORONER: The spirit is too goldarn willing.

MR. INGLIS: I repeat, Mr. Coroner, there is no quorum. Mr. Fenwick is absent.

THE CORONER: Maybe he'll drop in later. Maybe he's eating his lunch.

MR. INGLIS: At three in the afternoon? Hardly! I can quite understand that after the disgraceful proceedings which took place here this morning, a gentleman of Mr. Fenwick's sensibilities would be shocked beyond words, and might well choose to indicate his disapproval of this caricature of justice by remaining absent from the present and subsequent sessions.

THE CORONER: Like I said before, you ain't sick.

MR. INGLIS: I ain't — am not!

MR. BLODGETT: Say, Mr. Inglis, did you hear Phyllis read your shorthand notebook?

MR. INGLIS: Who didn't hear? It appears that Mr. Squire, the constable, told Mr. Hubbard, the second foreman of the fire company, who was loitering at the door while the reading was actually in progress. Mr. Hubbard told Mr. Dunn, the postmaster, and the word spread so rapidly through the village that it came to me, even though I was in bed, propped up by pillows, alternately inhaling ammonia and sipping warm clam-broth. Mr. Coroner, you have been guilty of an unpardonable breach of confidence! Mr. Coroner, my private papers, which fell into your hands through an accident, were privileged documents, by no means to be read into this case or any part thereof! The instant I heard what was going on, I tried to reach you on the telephone. I could not. I would have dressed, weak as I was, and come to this courtroom had not Mrs. Inglis sent for Dr. Fairless, who forbade me to leave the house until after lunch. But he could not prevent me from seating myself at my typewriter and executing a brief statement of nineteen pages, which I demand be instantly read into the record. Here is the statement.

THE CORONER: Nineteen pages? Let's see them. You don't space like we do, Mr. Inglis; I reckon they'll run to forty folios. That's four dollars extra for Phyllis, and ten dollars extra for me. Much obliged, Mr. Inglis.

MR. INGLIS: Even before I had finished my typing, the news of how I had been

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tricked last night came to me. I was alone in Tinsley's barn. I discovered I was being followed. I climbed into the loft. I distinctly heard the loud click of a revolver being cocked, and when I heard that click, I became unconscious. But it is now alleged there was no revolver, which is insulting to me, and that the loud click was merely the sound which you are accustomed to make, Mr. Coroner, when you eject the tobacco juices which have accumulated in your mouth! I repel your claim, Mr. Coroner, and I demand that my statement be read!

MR. BLODGETT: Why don't you spit for him to listen to, Lee?

THE CORONER: The Court will take it under advisement.

MR. INGLIS: I demand . . .

THE CORONER: Mr. Inglis, I don't know how much they told you, but Phyllis didn't read near everything there was in your notebook.

MR. INGLIS: She didn't?

THE CORONER: We skipped every now and then.

MR. BLODGETT: I'll say you did!

THE CORONER: But if you're dead sure you want this here statement put in the record, we could begin by reading in what we left out this morning. There ain't no other way we could handle it.

MR. INGLIS: Oh! . . . I see. . . .

THE CORONER: You can have your notebook back if you want. Give it to him, Phyllis. . . . There's a red line next to the parts we skipped.

MR. INGLIS: Oh . . . Oh . . . I appreciate your delicacy of feeling — and I admit that I have not yet recovered from the shocks of last night. Perhaps it might be well for me to reconsider . . .

THE CORONER: It's all right, Mr. Inglis. We men got to stick together. . . . You can hold on to the notebook, and if you feel like dropping it in the stove on your way out, why, that's your private business, and any juror that mentions it will be fined for contempt of court . . . Did you hear that, boys? Good . . . Well, boys, there ain't no quorum without Mr. Fenwick, but we know what to do about that because it'll be the same as we done this morning, when Mr. Inglis wasn't here. Mr. Inglis didn't hear some of the evidence, but Phyllis typed out those parts for him, and he can just skim through it while we go on. Right, Mr. Inglis?

MR. INGLIS: If you say so, Mr. Coroner, yes.

THE CORONER: Thanks, Mr. Inglis. I always knowed we'd get along fine just as soon as we got used to each other's ways, and I don't mind telling you now that them plaster-casts you made last night are some of the most important evidence we've had in this here courtroom.

MR. INGLIS: Plaster-casts — of my own footprints?

THE CORONER: A plaster-cast that caught up the wires I been hunting for ever since Sunday night! Mr. Inglis, it was you that found them!

MR. INGLIS: Don't mention it, Mr. Coroner.

THE CORONER: Seth, you've had a chance to study them wires. What do you make out of them?

MR. BLODGETT: Eighteen-gauge, stranded, rubber insulation, cotton on

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top. The cotton's in two colors: red and green. The wires are the same — gauge, color, everything — as the wires on the toy microphone.

THE CORONER: Any more?

MR. BLODGETT: Them wires must have went from the house to the barn. They was hooked up so there was a radio on one end and a mike on t'other. If the radio was in the house, a fellow could hear what was happening in the barn. If it was in the barn, he could hear what was happening in the house. Now, if I had been laying them there wires, I'd have used fourteen-gauge, lead-covered, because they went underground a long distance. . . .

THE CORONER: Thirty-one feet, five inches.

MR. BLODGETT: Was that all?

THE CORONER: Mr. Inglis measured the distance with a steel tape.

MR. INGLIS: I did, sir.

THE CORONER: That settles it.

MR. INGLIS: We might conclude, therefore, Mr. Coroner, that either the prowler set up this curious apparatus so that he could hear Mr. Tinsley moving about the house, or that Mr. Tinsley set it up so that he could hear sounds emanating from the barn.

MR. BLODGETT: There was radio parts found in the house.

MR. INGLIS: I was about to remark that, Mr. Coroner, and it suggests that the second hypothesis is the correct one. The late Alastair Tinsley, as you stated to me even before the inquest began, went about in mortal fear for his life. Good Heavens, that he should have been in such terror that he arranged a listening post to warn him of the approach of strangers! He may have had a dozen such posts scattered over his grounds!

THE CORONER: He didn't — but that's one way of explaining it. Yep, that's one way. From what he done you might think he was scared — scared stiff — and we know he was careless with matches. Mr. Inglis, you're foreman of this jury. Do you think you've heard enough evidence to find a verdict?

MR. INGLIS: I should say so, Mr. Coroner. Yes, I should definitely say so.

THE CORONER: Shouldn't be surprised if you was right. I know I made up my mind about what was what long ago.

MR. HUTCHINS: How about the prowler, Lee? You had a lot to say about him before lunch.

THE CORONER: Well, how about him? You boys know as much about him as me. You got to make up your minds, same as I done. But before you start arguing, there's one more witness I want you should hear. I got her name on this piece of paper, and she's waiting outside: "Mrs. Leroy Sinclair Filterton."

MR. INGLIS: Filterton, did you say, Mr. Coroner? Mrs. Leroy Filterton?

THE CORONER: Know the name, Mr. Inglis?

MR. INGLIS: I ought to! Leroy Filterton studied Latin under me at St. Barnabas' Preparatory School more than twenty years ago!

THE CORONER: He did, did he? Well, what can you tell us about him?

MR. INGLIS: A good student, sir, a very good student — if only he had not taken to drinking. . . . There! I'm sorry I said that.

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THE CORONER: We got a right to know, Mr. Inglis.

MR. INGLIS: I should not have spoken. The masters in preparatory schools are not supposed to disclose the failings of their pupils, who are a highly selected group, and who, in St. Barnabas', came only from families of the best social standing.

THE CORONER: Is that so? Well . . .

MR. INGLIS: When a boy starts drinking in prep school — which is unusual, and which is, moreover, forbidden by the rules in all such schools — the masters are prepared — well, prepared for anything. Leroy flunked out in his senior year. This is confidential, gentlemen! Some time later he inherited the family fortune. He married and was divorced. He married again and was divorced. The present Mrs. Filterton must be his third — she may be his fourth or fifth wife.

THE CORONER: Well, we'll have her in. Amos, show in the witness.

A PONY'S TALE

How DE DO, Judge?

How de do, everybody?

Got my property ready for me?

That's nice; I like property.

All you want me to do for it is tell you about myself?

Be my own press agent?

Well, I can't say I mind: I like to talk, and one of my favorite subjects is me.*

It feels funny to be in a courtroom the first day of my honeymoon!

It doesn't look a bit like what I expected.

Too friendly and sociable, if you know what I mean.

Newlyweds, that's what we are, Roy and me — married yesterday afternoon — and it's lucky we've got a chauffeur who never touches a drop, because if

*It is at the express request of Mr. Slocum that I contribute this annotation. Mrs. Filterton, probably forty, but made up to appear younger, turned out to be a smallish, over-dressed woman with vivid red hair, an expensive-looking fur coat, too much flashy jewelry, and a Pekinese dog. When she was shown to a chair she placed the dog on her lap and seated herself in a manner carefully calculated to display her legs to the jury. Mr. Blodgett, I regret to say, evinced much interest in them, and his first remark, after we subsequently retired to the jury room, dealt with that subject, a bit of levity for which I rebuked him, since I did not consider Mrs. Filterton's legs, of which I had an excellent view, either as attractive or as shapely as those of the preceding female witness, Betty Coombe Tinsley.

When Mrs. Filterton spoke to us it was in the kind of voice which I particularly detest: a high-pitched whine punctuated with too many meaningless little laughs. During the whole of her testimony an expensive automobile was parked outside the building, and I could study its occupants through a window near my seat. A man, grown older and coarser, but recognizable to me as Leroy Filterton, slept soundly propped up against the cushions in the rear. A uniformed chauffeur, who lighted a cigarette as soon as Mrs. Filterton left the car, lolled behind the wheel. E.J.I.

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Roy was driving he'd be in a different kind of courtroom — or in a hospital — this minute. It's a kind of a tradition in our crowd; when Roy starts on a honeymoon, he always goes in a new car, and if he doesn't get a ticket for speeding, which happened to him on four honeymoons, he wraps the car around a tree or a telegraph pole or anything handy before he's gone a hundred miles, which happened to him on one honeymoon and any number of times between. This is his sixth honeymoon, and after Roy celebrated by setting up drinks for all of our Fifty-second-Street friends, beginning at Madison Avenue and going west along Swing Lane, I borrowed a chauffeur from a high mogul who owns a night club, and he's driving us to Niagara Falls just as if I was a little salesgirl, and Roy a floorwalker in the shoe department.

Oscar knows where we want to go even if we forget. Oscar is the chauffeur.

Niagara Falls is where we're headed — as soon as I get the property — Niagara Falls and romance.

Romance is what I love.

I've always heard about the people that go to Niagara Falls on their honeymoons. I used to think there wasn't any such place, but then I reasoned out there must be; some of the couples I know — not many of them, but some — are married and stay married. Maybe they went to Niagara Falls, and it took.

Well, we'll start off hoping for the best.

Won't we make their eyes stick out when we get there?

It's not as if we were beginners!

Roy ought to know all about honeymoons; he's been on so many. It's only my second, but it's Roy's sixth.

I've had experience, but he's had post-graduate work.

Think of the persistence of that man — disappointed by five other women, but ready to take a chance with yours truly!

He believes in the old proverb, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again."

A man like that is really going places, even if he makes a stop-over at Reno.

Roy's outside in the car, waiting for me, taking a snooze, poor dear! Did he get tight last night! He just can't hold his liquor; after the tenth Martini he isn't himself.

This is the Empress, sitting in my lap; she wouldn't leave me.

The Empress is a Peke, with a pedigree that's longer than mine, and more brains than Roy and I put together. Now I don't mind riding with Roy when he's had a few cocktails, and is beginning to step on the gas a little, bless his heart; but the Empress won't put up with it. She sniffs his breath, and jumps out of the car. I believe she was a reformer in a previous incarnation. Do you believe in Karma? I do, and I think it's the most marvelous thing in the world! You ought to hear me when I've had a couple of Cuba Libres; I can talk about it by the hour! I try to guess what I'm going to be in my next incarnation, though being Mrs. Leroy Sinclair Filterton isn't so bad right now. . . .

You're going to give me my property soon, aren't you, Judge?

That's an old dear!

Roy's property is mostly tied up. He's got an apartment in town — attached

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by his fourth wife; and a house in Easthampton — attached by his third; and a yacht on which he took a lot of us to the boat races at Newport once — attached by his fifth. We might try moving into one of those places — I mean one of those on dry land — but the furniture has been taken away, and Roy says it might be chilly sleeping on the floor under a blanket of subpoenas. That's why I tell the poor dear man it would be a wise step to put everything else in my name for his own self-protection, and he thought that was a fine idea last night, but he says he hasn't got anything else, except two or three trust funds, and he's suing the trustees because all they will give him is the income, and he can't live the way we want to on that.

Think of it, Judge! There's a man who's worth millions! Millions! One of the most popular men in café society! And one of the best check-signers! And he gets an allowance, just a check on the first of every month, and I know that's hell, because for years and years and years I used to get an allowance like that from Mr. Tinsley.

2

I don't want you gentlemen to get any funny ideas about me.

While I know lots of little girls that do it, I don't take money from my gentlemen friends. Of course if they feel like showing me a good time, or buying me a little jewelry — nothing really expensive, if you know what I mean — that's another story; but the only money I ever took was alimony, and the only man who ever paid it to me was Mr. Tinsley.

The late Alastair Tinsley — him.

The ex-Mrs. Alastair Tinsley — now that I'm married to another man — me.

I met 'Stair when I was a pony in the chorus of a Broadway musical. I was an honor graduate of the best dancing school in New York. I was little, but I had talent; that's why I was a pony.

'Stair was press agent for the show — for a couple of months — and it never hurts a little girl to marry a press agent.

But she ought to make sure she's getting a good one!

If he's a bum press agent, she's giving up her chances of making a better catch — and for what? Her picture in the paper with eleven other ponies — just a flashlight, and no glamor to it; where does that get you? The line underneath says "Twelve Fast-Stepping Ponies from Broadway's Latest Hit," but while it tells you the name of the show, it doesn't tell you the names of the girls. What's there in that for me? 'Stair did make a shot of me on a polar-bear rug; he used to be a photographer, and he knew which end of a camera was which; but they wouldn't publish the picture because they said the bear was too mangy; he wasn't wearing enough fur, and, believe it or not, neither was I. As if a chorus girl should be dressed like a frozen Eskimo!

I said, "'Stair put a piece in the paper about how my jewelry was stolen."

He wouldn't do that. "Did you ever hear of a chorus girl that had jewelry worth stealing?"

"Well, then, tell them about my Southern family, which lost all of its money in the War."

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He used to snicker about that one. "Southern New Jersey, and they never had any money to lose!"

"Why don't you write up my milk baths?"

"Your which?"

"How I bathe in milk — every morning and evening — because it makes my skin white."

"Shades of Anna Held!"

"All right, but look what that story did for her!"

He snickered some more. "Honey, if we ever had enough coin, between the two of us, to buy a bathtub full of milk, we'd drink it."

That was what 'Stair was like. I was always giving him the swellest ideas, and he was always chucking them out of the window. And I ask you, how can a little girl love a press agent who doesn't get her any publicity?

Boy, do I remember those days! Me, washing my stockings in the wash-basin, and 'Stair trying to write stories on a borrowed typewriter!

I used to put my arms around his neck. "Write stories about me, 'Stair! Tell them about my talent! Tell them I'd be a swell Juliet."

He answered, "I've written that story so often that I almost believe it myself. The trouble is that I can't get anybody else to believe it."

He wrote a story that didn't have anything to do with me. It was about imaginary people, I mean, but it sold; he got twenty dollars for it, and the way he acted, you'd have thought he hit the jackpot. But we spent the twenty bucks in one night, drinking with a couple of my friends, and then he wrote another story, and when that sold, he began to get funny notions. He said he couldn't write his best in the room we had in that little hotel on Sixth Avenue; too many of my gang dropping in, he said; the wrong atmosphere, he said; and besides he couldn't get blotto at night and write the next day, he said.

Well, we split up. He went his way, and I went mine, and when we got divorced — I just couldn't see staying married to a guy who was letting my public forget all about me — we had a farewell party, with a couple of bottles of champagne, and he signed a paper agreeing to pay me a little money every month so long as I didn't marry again. It was a share of his earnings — only one dollar out of every three he took in, and if we both hadn't been drinking he wouldn't have agreed to give me so much and I wouldn't have agreed to take so little. One-third of nothing is nothing, and it doesn't matter whether you get one-third or two-thirds. In the beginning, I used to think he'd made a sucker out of me. I'd have been better off if I'd held out for ten dollars a week, flat. In the beginning I didn't take good care of that paper; it used to scare me afterwards when I remembered how I'd left it lying around anywhere. Why, it might have been burned! They might have thrown it out with the rubbish! But suddenly 'Stair began to send bigger checks on the first of every month, and I began to see his name in the magazines right along, and the checks got so good that I didn't have to worry about my figure any more because I could stop working.

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I read some of his stories in the magazines. They were awful. I never knew a guy could make big money writing stuff like that till 'Stair started to do it.

He bumped into me in New York one day, and he said, "Hello! I've been wanting to see you! How about revising that agreement?"

I said, "What agreement? And is that how you greet me when you haven't seen me in a dog's age, and why don't you tell me how swell I look?"

He said, "You know what agreement. When I signed it, I'd been drinking."

I said, "So had I."

He said, "I didn't mean to give you so much."

I said, "I didn't mean to take so little."

Well, we argued back and forth, but I've never had a head for figures, and I just couldn't understand. I said, "'Stair, you married me for better or for worse."

"Yes, but we're divorced."

I couldn't see that a divorce meant much between two good friends, particularly when one of them was raking in the dough hand over fist and wouldn't know what to do with it if he kept all of it. I said, "'Stair, we're divorced for better or for worse, just the same as when we were married. If you make money, I eat; if you don't, I go on a diet."

He snickered. "Honey, you don't look underfed."

Well, I wasn't dancing any more — just riding in the Park every other day — and I told him that. When you stop taking exercise it shows.

He said, "Maybe you don't understand. There's an income tax."

"What of it?"

He tried to explain to me that it said in the paper he signed he was to pay me one dollar out of every three he took in, but after he'd paid tax on three dollars, my third was more than his two-thirds. Just as I told you, I'm not good at figures, and when he started talking about gross and net, and how much the Government was nicking him, he might as well have been raving in a foreign language, if you know what I mean. The more he talked, the less I understood. Two-thirds is more than one-third, and nothing you say will ever change that; and while I didn't know anything about income tax, he'd agree to pay me one dollar out of three, and the tax on three dollars couldn't be more than a couple of cents. I said, "'Stair, if you say that my one-third is more than your two-thirds, I'll be agreeable. I'll change that paper so it says I get two-thirds and you take the rest."

He said, "Then there wouldn't be any rest at all. What do you say, Evvy? Let's make a new agreement. I'll pay you so much a year . . ."

My head was aching from so much arithmetic, and besides I had a date to have my hair done. And what was even more important was that there were several nice boys who had wanted to marry me, and I had turned them down because if I married I'd lose that measly one dollar in three that 'Stair was paying me. I said, "'Stair, I never pretended to be a business woman, so I hired a lawyer over a year ago, and he said if I ever met you and you ever wanted to change anything in that agreement, just tell you to

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talk to him, because he'd make it stand up in any court in the land."

He gave me a funny look. "I'm writing my head off these days, and if I become involved in a lawsuit, it will cost me a fortune." Did I tell you he had a loud voice, and when he said that people on Broadway stopped to listen? Well, they did. But 'Stair kept right on: "I've got a one-track mind, and I can't think about two things at the same time. It's easier to make money than to argue about it."

I said, "Good for you, 'Stair. I hope you make a lot."

"Because you'll get your share of it before I get mine, you mean? I tell you it's no joke! If they raise the tax rate again . . ."

He was yelling so and waving his arms around so much that a policeman came over to us, and said to me, "Lady, is this man annoying you? If he is . . ."

I said, "He is, and I'm late for a date."

The policeman just folded his arms and looked at 'Stair. "Beat it!"

We met only once or twice more after that, but always in the same way — accidentally — and all he could talk about was that one-third was more than two-thirds, which I knew it wasn't. But how that man must have loved me if he put away property for me up here! He married again, but he went right on loving me to the end. Judge, I wish you'd tell Roy about that when he's sober enough to understand what it means.

Do I get the property now?

Or do you want me to tell you more — though I've told you pretty near everything.

3

All right.

I could have married other men — lots of them! — but what little girl wants to take a chance when she's got a sure thing?

Marriage isn't what it used to be.

According to the story books they married and lived happily ever after; but in the set I travel around with the groom goes to the church with a check for the minister in one pocket and the Reno time-table in another.

Judge, if I gave you a list of the men who have proposed to me in the last fifteen years or so it would read like a roll-call of who says "Have one on me" on Fifty-second Street. But if I had married one of those men, 'Stair could have stopped his payments right away; that's what my lawyer said, and he said I couldn't break the rest of the agreement without breaking that part, too. And then if I didn't get along with my new husband, where would I be? I'll tell you where: eating and drinking and dancing in the same places till they found out I was broke. Then they'd put the skids under me!

Roy's outside, sleeping in the car.

Yesterday he thought he loved me. He said so. How's he going to feel about it tomorrow? If he loves me then, what's to stop him from falling for some other little girl next week? He's tried blondes and brunettes. I'm his first red-head. What if he decides that the old, conservative shades will be worn next season?

Judge, ever since I divorced 'Stair I played safe, living alone and liking it —

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and liking the checks that came in on the first of every month. I hated to give it up; I was never going to give it up; and then 'Stair spoiled everything by getting careless with the matches and burning himself to death!

Judge, when you told me that, I was so mad I could have screamed!

Last Sunday night — yes, while 'Stair wasn't looking where he tossed the matches — I was out on the town with my gang, and didn't get home till five in the morning. You guessed it: Roy was celebrating his fifth divorce, and just a few of his friends, twenty or thirty of them, were helping. I was sound asleep at noon, Monday, when you called me on the phone to tell me about 'Stair, and after you hung up, I just said quietly to myself, "Evvy, my girl, this is the cold, gray dawn of the morning after. You've had a grand time, but now it's over — o-v-e-r — over!" Sunday night I was a divorcée with enough coin to hold up my nose on Fifty-second Street, and let me tell you, if you haven't got money, out you go! Monday, after your call, I was back where I started from: a pony with only her wits between herself and the deep blue sea.

I jumped out of bed to take a good look at myself in the mirror. They say all women look their worst when they wake up; that morning I believed it.

There wouldn't be any check on the first of next month — or the month after that.

There wouldn't be any more checks at all.

If 'Stair had written books, like regular authors, it wouldn't have been so bad. Books bring in royalties, and I'd have had my share; but 'Stair wrote only for the magazines, and while he made plenty of money, it stopped short the moment he died.

While he lived, I'd had a swell time. I guess there was nobody worth mentioning in café society that didn't know me.

He was dead, and the party was over.

I was on my own again.

Well, what's the next move when a little girl is up against a proposition like that?

She's got to think of her future, and there's not a minute to waste!

Let the word get out that she's lost her meal-ticket, and she's through!

I had to act fast.

I put on my best man-killing make-up — you bet I know which it is! — and as the books say, I sallied forth.

My first proposal came at eight-fifteen. Yes, from a fellow who was drinking Martinis.

I said I'd let him know.

By midnight I had two more proposals: one over a Scotch and soda, and the other over champagne. When a little girl had been turning the men down for years and years, they don't expect her to start taking them seriously all of a sudden.

At one-thirty I bumped into Roy at his favorite night spot, and he proposed, too. Roy's hung up some kind of a record for divorces, but I'm older than the other girls who experimented with him, and I think I know how to handle him. If I get away with it, I'm entitled to whatever I make out of it. If I don't, I'm no

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worse off than I was. I had everything to gain and nothing to lose — but Roy didn't know that!

When he proposed, I said, "Roy, do you mean it?"

He said, "Sure!" just as he had said a dozen times before.

I grabbed him around the neck. I said, "Roy, it's a deal!" and we began to celebrate before he could change his mind.

That was Monday night — Tuesday morning — and we've been celebrating ever since. But we're married hard and fast — my lawyer, who was at the wedding, says so — and the marriage certificate is locked up in my safe-deposit box. It's not that I don't trust Roy, poor darling, but there isn't a woman living that knows better than I do how important it is to get a man's signature on a paper and then take good care of the paper.

Now, where's the property?

What is it?

It was like winning the daily double when you phoned again and said there'd be something coming to me if I'd just stop in.

Is it jewelry?

Is it stocks?

Money?

If you say it's mine, it's mine, and if the other Mrs. Tinsley tries to get it away from me, she'll have a fight on her hands!

THE CORONER: It'll be ready in a few minutes.

THE WITNESS: Do I have to wait still longer? If you only knew what it meant to me! If it's securities, say half a million worth — if 'Stair has been holding out on me all these years — how long do you think I'll stay married to that rum-hound sleeping outside in the car? Judge, have a heart!

THE CORONER: You'll have to wait just a few minutes, ma'am. . . . If you don't want to wait in the car, you might take a walk through the village. They say it's one of the prettiest little villages in New England.

THE WITNESS: Do you think I came here just for that? . . . Oh, the Empress is getting nervous! That means Roy's awake. I'll wait in the car.

THE CORONER: The constable will show you out, ma'am. . . .

MR. INGLIS: Is she out of earshot? Then may I inquire what is the property which you propose to turn over to her?

THE CORONER: It's something the second Mrs. Tinsley seen and don't seem to want.

MR. INGLIS: Valuable?

THE CORONER: Very. But it seemed to need something like that to get the first Mrs. Tinsley to pass the time of day with us.

MR. INGLIS: Wait a minute, Mr. Coroner! Wait a minute! You didn't meet either of these women until yesterday; yet you appear to have known, at least two days earlier, what they were going to say.

THE CORONER: Sometimes I guess pretty good, Mr. Inglis.

MR. INGLIS: Mr. Slocum, I admit it — without reservations. But you knew on Monday, less than a day after the fire, that there were two Mrs. Tinsleys. Now, how was that possible?

THE CORONER: Shucks, Mr. Inglis, 'tain't hardly worth mentioning. It struck

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me that a writer fellow, like this here Tinsley, might have his name in that fat red book. . . .

MR. INGLIS: *Who's Who?* There's a copy in my library.

THE CORONER: That's it! That's why I stopped in at your house and looked him up in it. It said how he was married twice and divorced once, and when I walked across the street to the lock-up and asked Ro-bair a couple questions, it turned out he knowed the café society lady. He'd worked on her at her apartment. He gave me her address and her telephone number. That was all there was to it.

MR. INGLIS: All there was to it, Mr. Coroner, but I, with the book on my own shelves, failed to think of it!

THE CORONER: Well, don't feel too bad about it, Mr. Inglis. You ain't got a suspicious nature, like me. . . . And now, do you think you might start finding a verdict?

MR. INGLIS: In the absence of Mr. Fenwick?

THE CORONER: He's coming. When he gets here, I'll send him into the jury room.

MR. INGLIS: As you wish, sir, as you wish. But first I have a question.

THE CORONER: Shoot it.

MR. INGLIS: In accordance with your suggestion, I have been glancing through the transcript of the morning's testimony, and like Mr. Hutchins, I was much struck with your repeated references to the person thus far identified only as "the prowler." If you know the answer, you should be willing to reply to my question. I ask you, Mr. Coroner, was there actually a prowler?

THE CORONER: Yes.

MR. INGLIS: What was his name?

THE CORONER: Alastair Tinsley. . . . And now, boys, I ain't a-going to answer no more questions! I done my guessing; it's your turn to do yours.

Like with the last inquest, there's a box of cigars on the table in the jury room — but since Mr. Inglis, here, don't like tobacco, they're a special kind that Hen Dodgett, over at the general store, says is denicotinized. . . .

. . . . . .

Shut the door after them, Amos. . . . Lock it. . . . If I'm any judge of human nature, Mr. Inglis is already explaining that "de" comes from a Greek word meaning "from," and that the rest of it comes from a Latin one meaning "Havana." Them cigars set me back plenty! . . . Did Mr. Fenwick come? . . . Got him in that little room "incommunicado," like Mr. Inglis calls it? . . . Well, let's have him in. . . . Come in, Mr. Fenwick.

MR. FENWICK: Where's the jury?

THE CORONER: In the jury room.

MR. FENWICK: Er — don't you wish me to join them?

THE CORONER: Yes — but not now. . . . Set down, Mr. Fenwick. You and me's got things to talk over. When you left this here courtroom before lunch, you didn't go in your house for more than a couple minutes.

MR. FENWICK: (no answer)

THE CORONER: You come out with a suitcase, and you put it in your car. Then you made a bee-line to the Taunton Inn.

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MR. FENWICK: (no answer)

THE CORONER: You sent your name up to Mrs. Tinsley — Betty Coombe that was — and she come down with her things all packed and met you in the lobby.

MR. FENWICK: (no answer)

THE CORONER: She'd paid her bill before that.

MR. FENWICK: (no answer)

THE CORONER: You took her arm — most any gentleman would do that — and you walked her out to your car. I don't know where you thought you was going to run away to, but when you got to the car you found Vince Hubbard at the wheel. You didn't know Vince was a constable, just like Amos Squire and Maynard Fisk? Well, he is, and he drove you to a safe place.

MR. FENWICK: The lock-up, which absolutely stank of lilac toilet-water! And Mrs. Tinsley and I, Mr. Coroner, were confined in the same cell!

THE CORONER: There ain't many men that would object to being locked up in the same cell with a young woman as pretty as that.

MR. FENWICK: Sir!

THE CORONER: It was the best we could do for you. Taunton's just a little village, and the lock-up is what they call co-educational.

MR. FENWICK: Mr. Coroner, your levity is out of place! I demand that you release us!

THE CORONER: Well, you're released. You're here.

MR. FENWICK: Don't quibble about words! I want you to let us go!

THE CORONER: Mr. Fenwick, after you've talked, yes. After you've talked, you can walk into the jury room and help the rest of them find a verdict. But first you got to talk. . . . Mr. Fenwick, I been watching you. You're a smart man. You ain't had much to say — except when I upset you, a-purpose, by talking about that there prowler and making you think we was going to send him to the electric chair for setting a fire which I know just as well as you do Robert Piper didn't have nothing to do with; but you got a first-class brain in that head of yours, and I want to hear what you got to say.

MR. FENWICK: What — what happens if I refuse to talk?

THE CORONER: I'll send you to jail for contempt of court. I can do it under Section 255.

MR. FENWICK: I'm not afraid of you!

THE CORONER: Nope, I didn't think you was. But Mrs. Tinsley — Betty Coombe Tinsley — might be afraid.

MR. FENWICK: You wouldn't dare touch her!

THE CORONER: I wouldn't touch her, no, but I'd hold her in the lock-up as a material witness. She tried to run away once; that's plenty of cause. . . . Yes, I reckoned that would make you think it over. Remember what Mr. Inglis wrote about you? I got it right in front of me: "I note here, with reluctance, how openly, and with what atrociously bad taste, he displayed his admiration for the beautiful young widow. Fenwick is a bachelor, I believe. He could marry; so could she . . ." Maybe you didn't know it, Mr. F., but it ain't etiquette for a juror at an inquest to flirt with the . . .

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MR. FENWICK: Stop! Stop!

THE CORONER: In plain English, you was fixing to elope with her, and her husband not dead a week.

MR. FENWICK: In plain English, Mr. Coroner, you are blackmailing me!

THE CORONER: Right, only I couldn't think of the word for it. . . . Phyllis is waiting, Mr. F.

MR. FENWICK: (no answer)

THE CORONER: I told you Phyllis is waiting. . . . You ain't under oath, so if you tell a few lies, they won't be perjury. . . . Look, I'll make it easy for you. I'll start your dictation. Take this, Phyllis: "Tinsley was my friend. . . ."

THE THOUSAND AND FIRST INVENTION

TINSLEY was my friend. . . . . .

. . . . . .

It was on that account that I didn't want to serve on this jury.

THE CORONER: The first lie, but 'tain't perjury. Go right ahead.

THE WITNESS: I've known Alastair Tinsley since his boyhood.

He came here because I lived in Taunton.

I saw him often.

Something of the history of his life has been brought out before you.

I can tell you more about it.

When he was young, he married a horrible woman, a detestable woman, a Broadway chorus girl who wanted money and nothing else in the world.

He lived with her less than a year.

He read into her character qualities which existed only in his imagination. For some months he was sure he loved her.

Then he began to wake up, not gradually, but all at once, and he took refuge in writing.

He could write fiction; he found that out the moment he tried it. He couldn't write literature, but he could write good, salable stuff. It sold; that proved it.

His wife might have encouraged him. She wasn't interested. She'd married him to get free publicity for herself. She couldn't see the sense of writing about imaginary persons.

They quarreled.

They kept on quarreling.

She suggested a divorce.

He hadn't thought of it, but it seemed to be a solution.

She suggested a separation agreement.

He had no objections.

She got him drunk, and he signed a paper she had had prepared: a promise to pay her, so long as she remained unmarried, one dollar out of every three he took in.

It was unfair from the beginning. A writer has his expenses, and sometimes they eat up half of his income. But Tinsley didn't quibble; he was glad to buy his freedom at that price, glad to buy it at any price.

Because he wanted to write!

Because he loved to write!

He didn't think of money or care about

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money.

He wandered — and wrote.

For fifteen years he wrote.

He earned large amounts, and didn't mind if Evvy — the first Mrs. Tinsley — got too big a share of them.

He was happy — or thought he was happy — probably because he worked so hard that he had no time to fret.

And then he met Betty Coombe — and loved her at sight — and wanted to bow down and worship her — and courted her for a year — and married her — and for the first time in his queer, blundering life, knew the meaning of real happiness. . . .

He had to live economically with Betty; there was that wretched separation agreement with the first Mrs. Tinsley. Evvy wouldn't marry again because she might lose by it, and besides, it was too much fun squandering the money Tinsley paid her. She lived better than Tinsley, and she wouldn't change a line in the agreement, even though Tinsley had humbled himself and begged her to.

Tinsley was quite willing to pay her a more than sufficient income — a fair share of what he had left after taxes had whittled his big earnings down into little ones — but that wasn't what Evelyn wanted. She liked being top dog. She admired her own cleverness in getting the better of her ex-husband. She wanted to hurt him, to begin with, because he had succeeded without her in a way he had never succeeded with her, and when he re-married, she wanted to hurt the second Mrs. Tinsley, whom she had never met, but whom she wanted to suffer. She had become a leading member of café society, and it cost a lot to hold up her end. The agreement was legal; the courts would enforce it; and she actually relished the thought that it was unfair to the man who had signed it.

Tinsley had been her husband for less than a year; he paid for it for more than fifteen. But Tinsley, unfortunately for the first Mrs. Tinsley, perhaps unfortunately for himself, too, was an ingenious man.

He was a story writer.

Ideas came to him incessantly; so many of them that he wrote under six pen-names.

It struck him that if he died — or appeared to die — under his own name, he could start life somewhere else under another — and there would be an end to the agreement.

He could go anywhere and make a living.

He could take a new name and make it well-known in a year.

He had invented a thousand stories; he began to think about the thousand and first.

THE CORONER: By the way, Mr. Fenwick, was Tinsley's voice as loud as Betty said?

THE WITNESS: Yes.

THE CORONER: Don't seem possible. . . . But he could tone it down if he felt like? He could talk quiet for hours on end if he had a mind to?

THE WITNESS: Of course. . . . Betty overdid it a bit.

THE CORONER: You know, I had a sneaking suspicion of that! When womenfolks lay it on, they generally lay it on thorough. . . . Well, I'm listening.

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2

Long, long in advance, Tinsley began to plot his own death. He had read books in which the hero sidestepped his difficulties by doing a vanishing act. Being a literary man, he had actually written two or three stories based on the same theme. He thought about them.

You will ask me how I knew. The answer is that I was his intimate friend, and he told me everything.

He decided it would never do for him merely to disappear, to drop out of sight, to be reported drowned. Evelyn would be suspicious; and with so much at stake, she would investigate. If he was to die convincingly, there had to be a body; and when Tinsley first considered the problem, that seemed a trifling detail.

He would go into the wilderness, he thought, and lose his way in a snowstorm. At any rate, word to that effect would be sent out. There would be a hunt for him, and he wouldn't be found; but one day, when spring came, the snow would thaw, and a body dressed in Tinsley's clothes, with papers in the pockets identifying it as Tinsley's, would be uncovered at the foot of a precipice — or in a deep thicket — or in a cave where he might have frozen to death. Tinsley liked the idea so much, when it first came to him, that he prospected the country, looking for the right stage-setting — he found it up here, by the way — but when he discussed his plans with Betty she laughed and told him that story-book fiction didn't always work in real life.

She knew what she was talking about, though the details were so grisly that he never mentioned them to her.

Did you ever try to buy a body, Mr. Coroner?

Considering the plentiful supply, the thousands of people who die every day, you'd think it would be easy.

It isn't.

Undertakers won't sell.

Grave-robbery is a felony, and Tinsley drew the line at that.

Some of the medical schools will sell bodies — at a price — but they ask questions, and you leave a trail so plainly marked that anybody can follow it.

"Wanted: a body, white, male, in the forties, must be hairless and toothless."

That's a pretty big order at the start and even if you can get what you want, the things that may go wrong afterward are innumerable!

Suppose you get your body. Suppose you break half a dozen laws and drive off with it. Well, a car won't go anywhere near the place where you want the body found, so you've got to lug it through the snow, one hundred and fifty pounds of it, and if you're seen carrying the damned thing, people may ask questions. They're an inquisitive lot, people, and while you might be nonchalant and say, "The body? Oh, that? I'm carrying it around because my doctor says I need exercise," you're dealing with a sad, distrustful world, and you might not be believed. What's more, if you carry it through the snow, you'll leave footprints there and back, and if you wait for a storm so severe that it will cover up your prints as fast as you make them, you may leave your own body there with the other.

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That's only the beginning of your troubles. Suppose you dress the thing in a spare suit of your own clothes. Suppose, by some happy chance, it resembles you, and there will be no fuss about identification. But what's going to happen if the searching party finds it the next day — and the coroner's physician says it's been dead six months? — or if he does an autopsy and discovers it's full of embalming fluid? — or if he goes a step farther and learns that the man who is supposed to have been frozen to death actually died of a cancer?

Tinsley had picked out the spot where the body was to be found: in the bottom of a ravine in the mountains east of Taunton. He visited the place in the early summer.

He'd have to wait for winter — many, many months off.

He'd have to wait for a snowstorm — in February or March — though it might come in December.

He'd have to be prepared, if you know what I mean, to take advantage of the moment whenever it came.

He'd have to make an elaborate plan, which might go wrong in a hundred different ways, and while an author can always look out for his hero when he's writing fiction, he can't do it when he's dealing with plain, honest-to-goodness life.

Tinsley decided he wasn't investing in any bodies.

THE CORONER: Lucky fellow, Tinsley, if he could talk about things like that with you, Mr. Fenwick.

THE WITNESS: He knew I would hold my tongue.

THE CORONER: Your specialty, ain't it? . . . And he knowed you had a strong stomach, so that all that there talk about bodies wouldn't upset you a bit. It's nice to know things like that about your friends. Now, if Mr. Inglis hadn't sized you up all wrong, he wouldn't have brought all them little bottles of smelling-salts to court for you to sniff at. . . . Well, Phyllis is waiting.

3

Tinsley changed his plans.

A new idea had come to him.

There would be a fire, and the beauty of a fire is that it destroys bodies. When it's over, there's hardly anything left.

THE CORONER: There was a skeleton left after this one.

THE WITNESS: I'm coming to that presently, Mr. Coroner.

Tinsley decided he would be trapped in a burning house — with a reliable witness watching, somebody whose word wouldn't be questioned, and he began to hunt for the right house. It had to be cheap, since there was a limit to the money he could put into his show, and it had to be isolated, because he didn't want to set anything else on fire. And there had to be a neighbor, not too near and not too far, preferably just one neighbor.

That neighbor would be his witness.

THE CORONER: Mr. F., why didn't he pick you to be his witness?

THE WITNESS: I was his friend.

THE CORONER: All the more reason.

THE WITNESS: All the less reason. In a matter of such a nature, his friend might not be believed; a stranger would be.

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How about it, Mr. Coroner?

THE CORONER: 'Tain't perjury.

THE WITNESS: I told Tinsley about the Starke house even before Jethro Dula advertised it. Since I don't own property here, since I'm a newcomer here myself, Dula had mentioned it to me. He's tried to sell me every property, bar none, that's come on the market in the last three months.

Tinsley drove up there one night and investigated.

He walked around.

He went through the house — it wasn't locked — and then, to find out the lay of the land, he stalked his way to Miss Mather's cabin, farther down on the brook.

He didn't realize how extraordinarily good the lady's hearing was until she almost caught him. There are compensations in life. Her eyesight is bad; perhaps that is why her hearing is so keen.

Tinsley was lucky to get away, but it was on that night, definitely, that the prowler legend started. Miss Mather told the R. F. D. man — which is like publishing a news item in all of the local papers. I heard of it. Possibly you heard of it. Tinsley heard of it — through me.

He bought the Starke place.

Dula had advertised it, and that had forced his hand; and when he moved in, a week later, and met Miss Mather, he diverted suspicion from himself by speaking of the prowler before she did.

A prowler fitted into his plans.

A prowler meant that Miss Mather would be on the alert — and he wanted her on the alert. He told her he had enemies; it was part of the picture he was trying to paint. He gave her reason to think he was afraid — and superstitious about it; that, too, was part of the picture. So was the big light he put up outside the house. And since burning down your own, uninsured building isn't a crime so long as there's no neighbor's building near it, he went right ahead with his plans.

He didn't foresee that one day an innocent man might be arrested for the crime — no crime at all — which he planned to commit.

When that happened, Betty was terribly upset.

THE CORONER: I noticed it.

THE WITNESS: So was I.

THE CORONER: "A man of a gentle and retiring nature." Yep, that's what Mr. Inglis wrote about you.

THE WITNESS: But Tinsley, never imagining that anything like that might happen in the future, went ahead as rapidly as he dared.

He knew that there was a lot of wood in the cellar when he bought the house.

He piled in more himself.

He familiarized himself with Miss Mather's habits; it wouldn't do, for example, to have the fire on a night when she wouldn't be there.

I think you will admit that he handled her skilfully; she might hate him, but she would be interested in whatever he was doing.

He waited for a dry spell, because a fire, with enough water in the brook to put it out, was not what he wanted.

When he was all ready — from here on I have to conjecture — he made sure Miss Mather would not miss the show by

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barricading the door of her cabin so lightly that she could push it open, and after that was done, he intentionally made the sound which woke her. You may ask what barricading the door had to do with it. I think I can guess at an answer. When she left her cabin, the branch fell, and even at a distance, he heard the crash. What was more, once out of doors, she would not return in a hurry. She would investigate — and he wanted her to be able to swear that she had seen him in the burning building before it collapsed.

But his plans went wrong.

When he touched off the fire, the flames spread so rapidly that there was an explosion, the stairs began to blaze from one end to the other in a fraction of a second, and he couldn't get out.

The building — seventy or eighty years old — was nothing but a fire-trap, and it burned faster than he had expected.

Miss Mather has testified how she saw him at a second-story window, hopelessly cut off from help.

Tinsley must have known, in that moment, that what he had begun as a hoax had become a tragedy with himself as the victim, but he made one splendid final gesture; he threw out of the window the manuscript of a literary work which he had just completed. I hope, for his sake, that he never knew it was burned to ashes before it reached the ground.

Then the building collapsed, and Tinsley died in the flames.

4

THE CORONER: That's sad, Mr. F.

THE WITNESS: Very.

THE CORONER: It's one of the saddest things that's ever happened in these parts.

THE WITNESS: I have told you what I know. I have conjectured the rest.

THE CORONER: Yep, you have; and for a fellow that leads a quiet life, like you, writing about Colonial doorways in New England, and not knowing much about practical things, you certainly turned out to be a first-class conjecturer. Mr. F., you're one of the best conjecturers I ever seen.

THE WITNESS: Thank you.

THE CORONER: Tinsley's dead, so he don't have to pay no more money to his first wife . . .

THE WITNESS: Evelyn.

THE CORONER: . . . and what you told me about him wasn't under oath, so 'tain't perjury.

THE WITNESS: Nor any other crime, I hope. I have admitted that I knew Mr. Tinsley's plans. Since they were not criminal, I was not an accomplice in any sense of the word.

THE CORONER: Nope. You was just his good friend — and now you're running off with his pretty widow.

THE WITNESS: Sir, I put it to you: if she's willing, why not? She has been through a terrible experience. I shall try to make her forget it; and perhaps Alastair would be glad to know that Betty is happy with me.

THE CORONER: Maybe he knows it already.

THE WITNESS: Maybe. I may mention that I have known Betty for some time, even though she pretended not to recognize me when we met again here. I have

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known her, and I have cared for her as much as my loyalty to Alastair would permit. There was not, as Mr. Inglis seemed to think, a sudden infatuation which began in this courtroom. . . . And now that everything has been cleared up, shall I join the other jurors?

THE CORONER: In a minute, Mr. F. In just a minute. . . . First I want you should look at them there bones again.

THE WITNESS: Alastair's bones? Poor chap!

THE CORONER: I know just how you feel, Mr. F. . . . This is a tibia. There's a hole through the end of it.

THE WITNESS: Mr. Inglis explained that a nerve passes through.

THE CORONER: Common sense says it don't. Look at the rest of them. Like Steve Newman said, I had no idea there was so many holes in our bones till I seen these. They're clean-drilled holes, too, made by a good, sharp point in a breast-drill! And every blamed one of them is countersunk!

THE WITNESS: I think you're wrong, Mr. Coroner. Here, for example, is a femur with no holes through either end.

THE CORONER: Give it here. . . . Watch me while I work on it with my tooth-pick. They was all like this when we found them, and Doc Fairless, who didn't have no time to waste, said, "Lee, bones is bones," like I told you. But then I started fooling around with them. . . . Ah! There's one hole — and there's the other! They was plugged with cement, or plaster, or something like that, but they was there for anybody who looked sharp enough, and they're all drilled clean as a whistle! Now, Mr. F., who do you think drilled them holes?

THE WITNESS: Somebody with a drill.

THE CORONER: Bright man, Mr. F.! Gosh, I said you was bright! Maybe *I* done it.

THE WITNESS: Maybe.

THE CORONER: Maybe it was your friend, Tinsley, himself. Think of that fellow setting home, evenings, drilling holes through the ends of each and every bone in his own body! Gosh, how that must have hurt! You know, Mr. F., there's just one more thing he should have done: he ought to have passed wires through them there holes, connecting each bone to the bone that comes next, and then he'd have had what the catalogues advertise as a real articulated skeleton, one hundred and twenty-five dollars F. O. B. New York City!

What have you got to say to that?

THE WITNESS: May I light a cigarette?

THE CORONER: Go right ahead. . . . Ready to talk some more? . . . Not yet? . . . Well, there's ways and ways! . . . You know, Mr. F., my daughter Phyllis reads good books. Yep, gets them out of the Taunton Public Library. Well, she tells me she read a book by an English writer all about a fellow who testified in court, and the judge wanted he should take his collar off so the jury could see if there was a birthmark on his neck underneath, and he wouldn't take it off.

THE WITNESS: I know the book. It's by Arnold Bennett. Not all the majesty of English law could make the witness take off his collar against his will.

THE CORONER: The same book! But while American law ain't got the majesty of the English kind, maybe there's ways

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of getting things done in Taunton, Litchfield County, Connecticut! If I wanted you should take off your collar — or something else — this minute, I wouldn't let you say "No" and get away with it! No siree, sir! I'd turn my back while the constables, Amos Squire and Maynard Fisk and Vince Hubbard, good husky men, all three of them, marched into this room, and when I looked around again, either your collar would be off, or three town constables would be hunting for new jobs! . . . Ah! Funny coincidence, Mr. F.! There's Amos opening the door, and that's Vince with him. I guess they can handle you all right, even without Maynard. Come right in, boys.

THE WITNESS: Mr. Coroner — Mr. Coroner — I — I was hoping that the jury would find a verdict that — that Tinsley was dead.

THE CORONER: If he is, who killed him?

THE WITNESS: (no answer).

THE CORONER: Mr. F., I want you should stand in front of that window there — yes, that's the one — looking out. . . . There's a lady setting in a car just outside. She's come up all the way from the big city because I phoned maybe there was property here that belonged to her. The lady's got red hair.

THE WITNESS: Evelyn? . . . Mr. Coroner, I beg you!

THE CORONER: Snap up the shade, Vince: that'll make her look this way. . . . Now wave at her, Mr. F.! That's right! Wave! Smile! . . . . . .

Phyllis, if you took down all the lady said before she hollered at the chauffeur and the car drove off, scratch it out! Like I told Mr. Inglis yesterday, this here courtroom ain't no den of iniquity, and most of her language wasn't fit for no young girl to hear. Put in two lines of dots; we'll know what they mean.

But you can write down the first thing she screamed when she looked through the window, and seen Mr. Fenwick waving and smiling at her.

"'Stair! Oh, my God, 'Stair!"

MR. SLOCUM COMMENTS

VINCE, pull down that shade; do you think we want strangers looking in and yelling at us?

You can go now, Vince.

Amos, help Mr. Fenwick to a chair.

You can go, too, Amos; he won't be giving us no more trouble. . . .

Now, Mr. F., this here's the majesty of American law speaking, only it ain't telling you to take off your collar. It's telling you to take off your hair. . . .

Gosh, but you're bald!

Bald as a calvatia, like Miss Mather said.

Well, now I know what a calvatia looks like.

Put on your hair again; there's a draft, and you'll catch your death of cold without it.

Your teeth are false, ain't they?

Just wiggle them a bit, so's I can see.

That'll do.

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Don't be so goldarn unhappy! The world ain't a-going to come to an end just because things ain't turned out like you expected they would!

Have a chaw? . . .

Then light another cigarette.

There!

Be careful where you throw that match!

Now I'm going to talk, and you're going to stop me if I make mistakes.

Ready?

Go!

2

You came to Taunton with the idea of disappearing, "doing a vanishing act," like you called it.

It looked so easy that you rented a house on Main Street right off — headquarters for operations, Mr. Inglis would say, and you lived there alone working out the details, the details that never did work out. But you loved Betty, and you don't need to tell me that; you was never here more than a couple days at a time. The rest of your time you spent with her.

You planned, and your plans wouldn't jell.

You prospected, like you told me, and it struck you you'd made a mistake, being so impulsive and landing on Main Street, Taunton, where everybody minds everybody else's business.

You heard of the old Starke house.

Just one neighbor near it, and that a woman that didn't see none too good.

That suited you fine.

You prowled.

She almost caught you at it, but that suited you, too: you liked the idea of there being a prowler — if you was him.

You bought the place and moved in.

You was two men at once: Mr. Fenwick in the village, and Mr. Tinsley up there; but this time your plans really worked.

You met Miss Mather, minus your hair, with something on your face that turned it brown, dressed in a lumberjack, and with plenty of dirt on your hands — and she looked right at you in this room yesterday and never guessed she'd met you before! You certainly knowed what you was doing when you picked out a near-sighted neighbor!

You boomed at her, like you boomed at me five minutes ago, so I was afraid the jury would be hearing you in the next room; but you wouldn't go to her cabin and eat there, when she asked you, because she might get a real close look at you and you couldn't risk that. Excepting the one time you told her about your teeth — because you wanted to be sure we'd hunt for them after the fire — you kept your distance when you talked with her. A woman who walks into this courtroom and starts to set on a table when it's a chair she's after, don't notice the fine points about a man six foot off; but she'd spot them sure as shooting if he comes nearer than that! She knows more kinds of mushrooms than I thought there was in the world — because she can look at them as close as she wants — but she knowed Mr. Tinsley and didn't recognize Mr. Fenwick!

Can you beat it?

It takes a fellow with a writer's imagination to plan a thing like that! It takes

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a fellow that studies folks, and knows what makes them tick!

You worked while you was up at the Starke house. You wrote stories and you let three different people hear your typewriter going; like you said, it was part of the picture. But you just couldn't get along without Betty, and you didn't let no grass grow under your feet.

You crammed the house with wood. You'd bought what there was in the cellar to start with, and you piled in more. No wonder you didn't want visitors in to see how much of it was laying around the kitchen, and the living room, and places where folks don't generally keep their kindlings. When the fire started, you wanted that house should go quick! You didn't want there should be time for the firemen to bust in, and see the gadgets you'd fixed up here and there!

What was it Miss Mather seen at the window that she thought was you?

A cut-out, dangling from a cord?

A sheet of roll-roofing, trimmed to make it look like a man? . . .

Yep, that's what I figured out, and when the fire shot up behind it, and a draft struck it, it moved like it was alive — not enough to fool me, maybe, but plenty to fool the near-sighted witness you picked out!

Miss Mather heard your voice from the window.

But a voice can come from a place where a man don't want to be, and a fellow that used to be a radio technician, like Betty said, would know how to fix up an arrangement that would do the trick!

What was it?

A microphone, a battery, a loudspeaker, and a line of wire between them!

Seth Blodgett told me confidential they was hooked up, so's a fellow in the barn could hear what was going on in the house. Mr. Inglis says they worked t'other way; it was a listening post, so's the man in the house could hear strangers in the barn. But you had a better idea, and you gave it a test the night Jethro Dula and Miss Mather came to see you. First you switched on a big light. It worked off the same battery. Then you talked — to the microphone, naturally — and Jethro, with that there light shining in his eyes and blinding him, couldn't look past it and see there wasn't nobody at the window! But I don't blame him for not hanging around to investigate. When an insurance agent hears somebody yell, "In ten seconds I start shooting!" he most generally knows it's time for him to be moving on to the next prospect.

Day after, being one of these here thorough fellows, you had the nerve to ask Miss Mather what was your voice like when she heard it, and she told you "It was terrifyingly loud." That was what you wanted to know, wasn't it? Sounded so much like your own voice that she didn't ask questions, and while you didn't dare shout into the microphone, you'd bought a good loudspeaker, and it done the shouting for you!

The night of the fire you used the same microphone and throwed it away when you was through with it; but I got to give

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Mr. Inglis credit: if one of the plaster-casts he made of his own footprints hadn't caught up the wires running from the house to the barn, I'd be asking you questions now instead of answering them. I'd been looking for them wires, because I figured they just had to be there; but they was so thin and skimpy that every time I run a spade into the ground it cut through them easy, and I didn't feel nothing.

Say, after you started the fun with something that exploded — a bottle of gasoline, or some contraption like that — you watched the fire, didn't you?

Of course you did!

You had to watch, if you was going to have a talk with your hand-picked witness!

She yelled, and you talked back from the barn!

You could never have reached out and pinched her if you'd had a mind to, but she didn't know that!

Your voice came from the second story of the burning house, and that's where she thought you was!

You had quite a chat with her, and you told her you was throwing a manuscript out of the window; but you stopped talking when the house fell in. You couldn't have kept on talking if you'd wanted to; when the floor caved in, the loud-speaker went with it.

Well, there ain't many men that can get off to one side, thirty-one foot, five inches, which is a safe distance if the barn don't catch fire, too, and watch themselves making what you called "one splendid final gesture" while they're burning to death!

3

You bought a skeleton, I don't know when.

Stop!

Of course I know when!

You bought if *after* you rented the house on Main Street but *before* you bought the Starke house on the mountain! You had it when you bought, because you asked questions about the wood in the cellar and you was planning on the fire then; and you didn't have it when you rented, or you wouldn't have wasted money renting!

Is that right?

It's got to be right!

It was what they call an articulated skeleton. You pulled out the wires that held everything together. Then you puttied up the holes in the ends of the bones.

You pulled the teeth with the pliers we found after the fire. "Plates badly broken." That's what Doc Fairless wrote, and I read it to the jury. These are the plates, at the side of the jaws. You broke the lower jaw, too. Maybe that was an accident, seeing the Lord made you a writer and not a dentist. Maybe you done it a-purpose, figuring you'd fool an ignorant country coroner like me. I don't know. But when Betty told us you'd broke your jaw flying, which was when you lost every tooth in your head, Mr. Inglis put in a note, "This agrees with the fractured condition of the lower mandible," and he seemed to think he'd done something right smart.

Only it don't agree, and I don't have to ask Doc Fairless about it, neither.

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Alastair Tinsley's jaw was broken while he was alive; the bones knit together again, and it healed. The skeleton's jaw was broken after it was dead; the bone was smashed in two pieces, and they never will knit together.

But I'm not stopping here to cuss you out if you figured I was dumb, or to say "much obliged" if you reckoned I wasn't. You put the skeleton in the cellar; most likely you took it apart there. You had an extra set of false teeth made — brand new — and you left them where you wanted them found. You melted down the mounts first; you had to be sure they was melted, and then, when you touched off the uninsured house, with nobody else's buildings near it, everything was just as legal as Christmas!

That's a question that's been bothering me ever since: what crime did you commit?

I've read Sections 6087, 6088, and 6089 till I know them by heart, and 'twasn't arson. Even if the deed to the house wasn't in your name, it was in Betty's, and we know she won't go back on you.

You didn't try to defraud an insurance company, so you can't go to State's Prison for ten years.

It's a felony to burn a building if there's horses or cattle in it. You didn't keep even a dog or a cat.

You can be fined fifty dollars or jailed for thirty days or both if you commit wilful injury to a highway in the state of Connecticut; but the Starke house was quite a piece from the road, and the road's so bad anyhow that there ain't nothing anybody could do to make it worse.

You ain't guilty of murder, homicide, manslaughter, assault with a deadly weapon, robbery, burglary, breaking and entering, grand larceny, petty larceny, or even false registration of the ratty old car you left in the barn. The car's licensed in the name of Alastair Tinsley, like it should be, and the nice new car Mr. Fenwick drives around Taunton is registered in the name of the leasing company from which he hired it.

You ain't guilty of contempt of court. You had no business setting on the jury, I guess, but you done your best to be excused. If this was a regular court, there'd be a mistrial; but there ain't no mistrials before a coroner. You're on the jury, and on the jury you stay till it finds a verdict!

I read the law book, Mr. Fenwick, till my head ached, and it's full of crimes of which you're as innocent as a newborn lamb. Maybe the Legislature was careless at Hartford, but it never occurred to them to pass a law saying a fellow shouldn't take part in his own inquest. It's unusual, I guess, but it ain't illegal.

The more I think it over, the surer I am that you done something wrong, but I'll be shot if I can give it a name. You've frittered away my time and the time of the jury. The coroner, the court stenographer, the jurors, and the constables have been through a lot of waste motion. Doc Fairless examined the bones. Amos Squire drove to New York and back. I done a lot of long-distance telephoning. Ro-bair spent four nights in the lock-up.

There's just one fellow that's better off for this here inquest, and that's Alastair Tinsley, alias George Fenwick, alias

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six pen-names, like you admitted yourself.

When a plan don't work one way, sometimes it works another.

You killed Mr. Tinsley so's you could stop paying money to Evelyn, his first wife. Now that I seen her — and Betty — I can tell you, as one married man to another, I don't blame you a bit. But Evvy, getting wind that Mr. Tinsley was dead when I phoned and broke the news, went right out and grabbed herself a new husband, and the agreement says Mr. Tinsley pays only so long as she don't remarry.

Don't get so excited!

Quit talking so loud!

Sit down!

Well, if you won't sit down, stop jumping around!

Stand in one place for a second!

Yep, you ought to know what's in that there separation agreement. So long as Evvy didn't remarry, Mr. Tinsley had to pay; but that wreck sleeping in the car — did you notice him? — was Leroy Sinclair Filterton, and that's Evvy's new husband.

They got married yesterday, in front of witnesses.

They bought drinks for all their friends on Fifty-second Street to celebrate.

They're going to Niagara Falls on their honeymoon, Mr. and Mrs. Filterton, and there's a marriage certificate which I ain't seen, but Evvy told us how it's locked up tight in her safe-deposit box. For better or worse, they're hitched.

Will you stop talking so loud?

You say you'll pay for the inquest?

You'll pay the jurors — me — Phyllis — everybody?

I'd like to take you up, but I can't even consider it.

I'm a public official, and if I let you give me money, you'd be corrupting me. But you can always trust a Yankee to turn an honest penny; the county will pay, and that way it will be legal.

The jury's waiting.

Yes, go right in, Mr. Fenwick.

Go right in and help them; you ought to get a great kick out of it.

But don't say nothing about that there offer you made to pay for the inquest, because Bill Hutchins would snap it up and collect twice!

The verdict?

You can trust smart men like Mr. Inglis to bring in one that's right. If I was you I'd shut my trap and vote "Aye."

Buck up, Mr. Fenwick!

Buck up!

What do you make of a man like that, Phyllis? Two minutes ago he was mournful. One minute ago he was so happy he was hollering. Now he looks like he was going to bust out crying!

Pull yourself together, man!

I wasn't joking when I told you Evelyn's married!

She's married, hard and fast, to another fellow, and she ain't a-going to worry you again so long as you live! From now on you and Betty's going to have fun!

Pinch yourself; you ain't dreaming — or asleep!

Happy days are here again!

Say, before you go, where did you get that skeleton?

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Speak up, won't you?

First you yell, and now you're swallowing so hard I can't half make out what you're saying!

Get this, Phyllis: the circus that went broke in Copake in July — yes, I remember; the side-show sold the curiosities at auction; for twenty-two dollars and fifty cents he bought — sure I heard of him! who ain't heard of him? — he bought one of the two genuine skeletons of the celebrated train-robber and bandit, Jesse James!

Much obliged, Mr. Fenwick.

Phyllis, unlock the door to the jury room.

Mr. F., tell them, now that they got a quorum, I want they should hurry up with their verdict!

Phyllis, lock the door after him.

And to think it's the bones of Jesse James we been setting on, careless, without knowing it!

4

How many folios so far, Phyllis?

Gosh, I wouldn't have believed it!

But if there's so many folios already it won't be wrong if I dictate just a few more. Some day there'll be a new coroner, and who knows, reading them over will help him.

The fire was last Sunday night.

I had an idea it was going to happen about a month before that, and by the Tuesday morning after it was over I could give a pretty good guess what was what.

But a coroner ain't supposed to guess. Section 247 says he can summon "a jury of six judicious men to assist him." That's what I done. Seven heads are better than one, and besides, the jurymen get three dollars a day apiece.

Phyllis, I leave it to you to say if I wasn't fair with that jury.

When I found out something, I told them.

What I knew, they knew.

I put two and two together.

If they didn't, or if they made it come out different, it was because they liked it better their own way. I ain't smart, like Mr. Inglis, who's got more education than he knows what to do with, but maybe I'm more suspicious, and the moment I heard Mr. Alastair Tinsley had bought the old Starke house I began to think.

Tinsley had money. Why should he live in a tumble-down shanty like that? No electricity, no running water, no plumbing, no furniture good enough to be worth stealing; why should he put himself out to be so gol-darned uncomfortable?

He wanted privacy. Why should he go way up on the mountain? Mr. Fenwick was getting all the privacy a man could ask for right on Main Street, in the house he'd rented a couple of months before, and he didn't have to live like a pig to do it. When Mr. Fenwick didn't want to see Mr. Inglis, he just didn't answer the bell. Is that privacy, or ain't it? There's lots of things you can't find in Taunton: there's no saloons, pawnshops, trolley-cars, or skyscrapers; but privacy, for all your inquisitive neighbors, is just dripping from the elms that line the village green.

There was lots of wood in the Starke house; eight or nine cords, Jethro Dula

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told the jury. Fred Starke, he said, must have spent all his summers chopping up stove-lengths and kindlings against the winters. Tinsley bought the wood; he asked special did it go with the house. Then why did he start chopping up more wood after he moved in himself? Exercise? Maybe. But where was he going to put it with the cellar full?

I listened extra careful while Miss Mather was telling the jury how she seen Tinsley carrying kindlings into the house an armful at a time. I expected Mr. Inglis would snap at that before she got the words out of her mouth.

He didn't.

How come he missed it?

Phyllis, they call these things clues, and I want you should remember the most important one. The fellow that takes a risk he can pass on to an insurance company ain't just stingy; he's plain dumb. Tinsley bought a shack that would go up like a heap of shavings if he ever dropped a match where he shouldn't — and he wouldn't buy fire insurance! I asked questions about him when I heard that.

There wasn't a man in the village that had met him face to face, but Jethro talked with him over the telephone, and Jethro said he was no fool.

If he wasn't that, what was he?

Take a fire-trap, so far from the village that the fire company can't help, a cellar full of kindling wood, more kindling wood piled in the house wherever it'll go, a fellow who won't spend a few dollars for fire insurance, and add them up together.

There's only one answer, and that's what I got.

5

Surprised when I heard Tinsley's was on fire?

Not me!

I went up there and watched.

I walked around and asked questions.

I seen the car in the barn, climbing in through the window when I found the door was padlocked. It was a sick-looking car, eight, nine years old, and any fellow paying forty dollars for it would be stuck. But Jethro told the jurors how Tinsley drove to Taunton and back in one day in his car; Hank Pruitt told them what the car was like, and nary a one of them asked a question! Why, the drive Jethro talked about was a good two hundred miles, and that there car would break down before it went fifty!

I looked it over careful.

No battery; well, Tinsley took the battery out to burn the big light he'd screwed on the side of the house; but if he done that, how could he run the car when he left every other day or so, even if the car would run? Yes, he could carry the battery back and forth; but he wouldn't take the trouble, because if he was going places and wanted to be sure of getting there, he'd take some other car! You can bet your bottom dollar, Phyllis, that while he lived in the Starke house, that other car was hidden somewhere behind the thickets along the roadside, and it was the new one that Mr. Fenwick drove when he went skyhooting over the country making pictures of Colonial doorways for the book that ain't never going to be printed!

It was the night of the fire that Miss

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Mather told me what she told the jury a couple days later: how Tinsley throwed a story he'd just finished out of the window of the burning house.

Believe it?

Tinsley thought nothing of writing a story in a day. He did that most every day if he wasn't writing a novelette, he said himself.

Would a fellow that turned them out that easy risk his life to save one day's work?

Not on your tintype!

Then why did he say he was saving the story he just wrote?

Because the smoke wasn't hiding the cut-out he'd made to look like a man, or the house wasn't caving in fast enough, and he had to do something to explain why he didn't jump!

After the fire Hank and me went through the ruins. I had Hank read a list of what we found, and I told the jury to pay attention, because that list was important evidence.

Well, they heard Hank read it. They heard about the iron bed, the iron kitchen sink, the iron pump, the iron pipe, the iron hardware, the steel key-ring with the iron keys. They heard me ask Hank, "Find anything else in the cellar?" and they heard him answer, "Metal — nothing bigger than a man's fist. Most of it was iron, not melted." There wasn't nothing that was made of iron that was melted, and he told them that again and again. Then where was the typewriter Jethro Dula heard going lickety-split, and which should have been rattling away until the very minute the fire broke out?

Tinsley took it away before the fire, that's the answer! He didn't lose money on burning down the house, because it wasn't worth nothing, and the land without the house will fetch the same as it would with it. He didn't lose money on the car he left in the barn, because it will sell for the junk price he paid for it. He lost the price of the skeleton, twenty-two fifty, and maybe as much more that he paid out for the light bracket, the loud-speaker, the locks, and one thing or another; but the typewriter was a good one, and being a legal resident of Connecticut and a real Yankee, he wasn't proposing to throw away the cash it was worth. Like Mr. Fenwick told us, there was a limit to the money Tinsley could put into his show. Remember renting a house on Main Street and buying another on the mountain had set him back quite a bit!

But there's other reasons, too. . . .

I'm a rifleman, Phyllis, and you know how I feel about my rifles. I wouldn't sell them, loan them, or give them away. Maybe a fellow who writes feels that way about his typewriter. He'll burn down a house, but he ain't ruining a machine he's used to and that puts his stories on paper as fast as he thinks them out.

Phyllis, when you're looking for evidence, sometimes the thing that ain't there is a heap more important than the thing that is! If he'd left the typewriter in the house, he'd have made it a whole lot harder for me! . . .

Speaking of weapons, where's the shotgun Tinsley said he bought? If he kept it by him, like Miss Mather thought, we should have found the barrel in the cellar,

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because steel gun barrels don't melt.

We didn't.

Did he take it away before the fire, being thrifty?

Well, what's your guess, Phyllis?

Gosh, you don't hardly have to guess!

He scared Jethro Dula out of a year's growth when he hollered he'd shoot him from the window, but he couldn't have done it if he'd wanted to! He was in the barn, talking in the microphone, and the shotgun wasn't nothing but Yankee bluff! There just wasn't any gun! That's how come it burned up complete, with nary a trace of it for us to find when we sifted through the ashes!

We found the teeth in the cellar.

Think of it! Tinsley's teeth mixed in with the bones of Jesse James!

I asked Betty the name of Tinsley's dentist.

She told me, and she gave me his address and telephone number.

Stop and think, Phyllis; stop and think!

A fellow's wife might know the name of his dentist. She might know his address, though it ain't likely when she's a young woman with sound teeth in her own head. But she wouldn't know his telephone number in a big city unless she was expecting me to ask for it and wanted to be ready to give it to me the moment she met me!

I told the jury what happened.

I didn't hold back nothing.

There was the time for a deducer like Mr. Inglis to do some fancy deducting, only he didn't. He wrote down that Betty Coombe Tinsley was pretty, which is true enough. He measured her prettiness, like you measure temperature on a thermometer. He wrote she had a lovely smile and she was intelligent; but it never struck him that she had no business having that telephone number on the tip of her tongue, and when she fainted right here in court he thought she was upset by a handful of teeth and not by the idea that after all Tinsley's scheming I made it look like Ro-bair, the German hairdresser with the French name, was going to be electrocuted for murder!

6

There was another line in Hank Pruitt's evidence that the jury didn't take serious enough.

What was it?

He seen Mr. Fenwick at the Tinsley fire.

Sounds innocent, don't it?

A fire's sociable, just like Hank said; when you go to a fire you meet a lot of your friends, and I was there, like Tom and Bill and all the regulars.

But there's some folks that don't never go to fires, and Mr. Fenwick, with the "gentle, retiring nature" that Mr. Inglis wrote about, was just about number one on the list! There was a pretty good chimney fire a couple of days after Mr. F. rented that there house on Main Street, and it was so handy he could have walked there if he'd felt like it.

He heard the siren, he seen the fire truck going by, and what did he do?

He kept on typing — on that there book he ain't writing on Colonial doorways in Southern New England! I drove right by his house, and I seen his head bobbing up and down at a second-story

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window!

Even if some of the jurors didn't know that, they knowed Mr. Fenwick, who played his part like a real stage actor. "Gentle" and "retiring"; he lived up to it. Well, would it be natural for a fellow like that to get out of bed to drive to a fire at half past eleven on a Sunday night? If he was there, why was he there?

When we didn't find the typewriter Monday, I started figuring how it was took away the night before. Somebody must have put it in one of them local cars, fifty or more of them, that drove up to see what was going on. Whoever it was stayed while the house was burning; what with the fire truck and a whole procession after it driving toward Tinsley's on a narrow road, there wasn't no chance for a car headed the other way to get by.

Well, I'd had a good look at everybody that was there, and when I got a description of Tinsley from Miss Mather — mind you, she was the only living soul in Taunton who ever seen him near by — I done some thinking. You see, Phyllis, it was that early that I was on the right track!

Suppose a fellow wants to make himself look different, what does he do?

He works by opposites — and he changes the things that's easiest to change. He knows it ain't a-going to take much to fool a near-sighted woman. Nobody else ain't going to get a look at him.

Tinsley was the loudest-speaking man I ever heard tell of. Who is the softest? Yes, you guessed it.

Tinsley was bald. There's a man in this village with so much hair that Ro-bair mentioned it; "the heavy head of hair," he said. Mr. Inglis wrote, "wavy blond hair."

Tinsley's face was sunburned. Mr. Inglis wrote about Mr. Fenwick's "pale features"; "light-complected," says Robair.

Tinsley's hands was always grimy. Miss Mather noticed that because he picked mushrooms and passed them over to her. Mr. Fenwick's hands are always clean. Mr. Fenwick always looks as if he just stepped out of his Saturday night bath.

Tinsley was "roughly dressed." He wore a lumberjack "with screamingly loud colors." Mr. Fenwick's as neat as a pin, and lumberjacks ain't for him.

Tinsley left town every now and then — at least once a week. So did Mr. F. No, I never checked to see if Mr. Tinsley and Mr. Fenwick was ever in Taunton at the same hour. Why not? From the beginning I was sure they wasn't!

In the things you could change in a couple of minutes, they was opposites. In the things that couldn't nohow be changed, they was the same.

They was the same age.

They was both average height. Miss Mather didn't say Mr. Tinsley was tall, and she didn't say he was short.

When a witness don't notice a fellow's size, it's always average.

They had false teeth, both of them, only you noticed them quicker in the dark-complected fellow.

They was both writers, and they both done their writing on typewriters.

They was both unsociable, and when they didn't want to see somebody, they took to the second story and started

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working instead of standing at the door and telling the fellow that was pestering them to get out.

Tinsley used to be a photographer; Fenwick said *he* took pictures. You can't say that if you don't know something about it, and you don't know something about it if you ain't done it.

Tinsley was "the best handy man that ever lived," says Betty Coombe Tinsley. He lived alone. Well, Mr. Fenwick lived alone, too, and if you do that you just got to be a good handy man.

Phyllis, in some things the two fellows was so different that I couldn't think of one without thinking of t'other; and in everything else they was so much alike that it was a toss-up which was which.

7

Ask Mr. Fenwick how he come to set on this jury, and he'll tell you it was coincidence.

Coincidence, my eye!

A coroner don't guess, like I told you, because the business that comes before him is just about the most serious there is in the world; but I had a hunch it would be interesting if I could get Mr. Fenwick on the coroner's jury that was to set on the body of the late Alastair Tinsley. If I was right, I'd learn a lot by watching him squirm; and if I was wrong, I wouldn't be hurting nobody.

I could have subpoenaed him myself. I didn't have to when Mr. Inglis had a heart-to-heart talk with me, telling me I should draft what he called "intelligent" men for the jury.

Well, I took Mr. Inglis as foreman right off; I could see he was going to give me a lot of trouble, but it would make Mr. F. unsuspicious.

Mr. Inglis gave me five names.

I cut out two, telling him they voted Democratic, which one of them didn't.

It narrowed his list down to Mr. Pearson, Mr. Osbaldiston, and Mr. Fenwick.

Mr. Pearson is a non-resident, and I knew it.

Mr. Osbaldiston's in Guatemala, and I knew that, too.

That left just Mr. Fenwick, and if Mr. Inglis thinks he picked him out himself, then he's like the fellow that picks the ace of spades out of the deck that's fifty-two aces, all spades, and figures he could have picked some other card if he'd felt like it!

Coincidence?

We know better, you and me, but we ain't talking!

Phyllis, I mean that, and I'm going to caution the constables. The nice part about gossip that comes from this courtroom is that I can turn it on or off when I want, like there was a faucet, and I don't aim to hurt any man that's been through so much as the late Alastair Tinsley.

What a life that poor devil led for fifteen years with a blood-sucker fastened on to him, and him so unpractical he didn't know what to do about it!

He could have upset the agreement if he'd went to law. He didn't, because he hated to take the time from his writing.

With a regiment of pen-names, he could have given that worthless first wife of his a share out of what he made

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with one, and he could have kept the rest for himself — and Betty.

He was just too honest to think of it.

Maybe he was a bad author, like he said himself, but he loved his work, and you can forgive a man a lot for that. It's the fellows that love their work that learn how to do it better and better.

Think of it, Phyllis; one of these days, maybe, he'll borrow Mr. Inglis's notes and write a book about this here case, with Mr. Fenwick setting on the jury accidental-like! Then you and me, Phyllis, will be in print for folks to read about!

What'll they say about me?

I guess they'll say, "Coroner Slocum? Gosh, ain't he dumb!"

But he won't mind.

We're public servants, and we do our duty, even if it don't make us rich, what with inquests so few and so far between.

I hear the jury knocking at the door.

Let them in.

. . . . . .

SIX JUDICIOUS MEN

MR. INGLIS: The jury, Mr. Coroner, has agreed upon a verdict.

It was not easy.

Indeed, as we discussed the case, unsuspected complications cropped up here and there, and we went into all of them thoroughly. It was the jury's first opinion, as it was mine, too, that the late Alastair Tinsley, beset by problems which might well drive any man mad, had committed suicide while temporarily insane. We would have brought in a verdict to that effect, with an addendum by me suggesting that the manuscript Mr. Tinsley threw out of the window was probably a holograph last will and testament, and not a story at all, had it not been for the eloquence of Mr. Fenwick, for whose help we can never be sufficiently grateful. Mr. Fenwick expressed the view that we ought not heap obloquy upon the memory of the deceased — *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*, as the noble Roman tongue has it: "Say" (understood) "of the dead nothing except that which" (both "that" and "which" being understood, the literal translation of *nisi* being "if not") "is" (the verb being absent, but understood) "good" — and in deference to his views we have concurred in a verdict which is so non-committal that it cannot be criticized on the score of good taste.

We find, Mr. Coroner — pardon me if I wipe my glasses so that I may make no error in reading this short but important sentence — "The jury finds that the late Alastair Tinsley came to his death by misadventure."

THE CORONER: "The late Alastair Tinsley came to his death by misadventure." Is that the verdict of all of you?

MR. INGLIS: Yes, Mr. Coroner.

MR. FENWICK: Yes, sir.

MR. HUTCHINS: Yes.

MR. NEWMAN: Yes, Lee.

MR. EASTON: Yes.

MR. BLODGETT: Yop.

THE CORONER: Well, you're unanimous, all right, and I wish I could accept

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that there verdict, but I can't. Gentlemen of the jury, I'm going to throw it right out . . .

MR. FENWICK: Mr. Coroner!

THE CORONER: . . . under Section 247, which says "the coroner shall instruct such jurors." After you went in the jury room, boys, I found out you hadn't been setting on the body of Alastair Tinsley.

MR. INGLIS: Mr. Coroner!

THE CORONER: Yep. Bones is bones, like Doc Fairless says, but these here bones ain't never had nothing to do with Mr. Tinsley's body.

MR. INGLIS: Mr. Coroner, you overwhelm me with astonishment!

THE CORONER: Mr. Inglis, it ain't nothing compared to what's coming next. These here bones, boys, are from one of the two genuine skeletons of the celebrated bandit and train-robber, Jesse James.

MR. EASTON: What?

MR. HUTCHINS: Jesse James?

MR. NEWMAN: Whew!

MR. INGLIS: Will you — will you repeat that, Mr. Coroner?

THE CORONER: Yes, Mr. Inglis. These bones are from one of the two genuine skeletons of Jesse James, the celebrated train-robber and bandit.

MR. HUTCHINS: How in tunket did you find that out, Lee?

THE CORONER: Never mind.

MR. NEWMAN: Well, I'll be damned!

MR. INGLIS: Mr. Coroner — Mr. Coroner — such strong language is beyond me, but — ahem! — Mr. Newman has perfectly expressed my own sentiments.

MR. EASTON: Jesse James!

MR. BLODGETT: Lee, I know a poem about Jesse James.

THE CORONER: Yes? How does it go?

MR. BLODGETT:

"Jesse James was a lad that killed a-many a man;
He robbed the Danville train,
But that dirty little coward that shot Mister Howard
Has laid poor Jesse in his grave."

MR. HUTCHINS: Go on, Seth! Go on!

MR. BLODGETT: Here's the chorus:

"Poor Jesse had a wife to mourn for his life,
Three children: they were brave;
But that dirty little coward that shot Mister Howard
Has laid poor Jesse in his grave."

THE CORONER: Seth, that's going to be important evidence!

MR. INGLIS: Evidence?

THE CORONER: What else did you think it was, Mr. Inglis? . . . This here inquest is over. There's no verdict, because the body of the late Alastair Tinsley ain't here, like the law requires. For all we know to the contrary, it walked away, and it's living somewhere else. Wherever it is, 'tain't none of our business. Boys, you get your money just the same, and so do I and Phyllis, soon as I can put in the bill. But beginning on Monday, at 10 A.M. in the morning, the jury will re-convene, excepting Mr. Fenwick, who's satisfied the Court he needs a vacation because the long hours, ten to twelve, and three to five, ain't agreeing with his health, and after the skeleton's been properly identified, we'll begin to hear the witnesses.

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MR. INGLIS: Mr. Coroner! I think I can guess! Dr. Fairless, whose name you have so often mentioned, will identify the remains!

THE CORONER: We'll know more about that on Monday. In the meantime the law says that where there's bones, there's an inquest, and where there's an inquest there's folios at a quarter apiece for me and a dime apiece for Phyllis.

MR. HUTCHINS: Don't forget three dollars a day for the jurors, Lee!

THE CORONER: Don't worry! I ain't forgetting! . . . While the Court adjourns, Seth, you better dictate all you remember of that there poem to the court stenographer. There may be clues in it, and I don't want you should forget them.

MR. BLODGETT: The murderer's name's in the next verse, Lee. Phyllis, it goes to music, and I'll sing it:

"It was Robert Ford, that dirty little coward,
I wonder how he does feel,
For he ate of Jesse's bread, and he slept in Jesse's bed,
Then laid poor Jesse in his grave."

THE END

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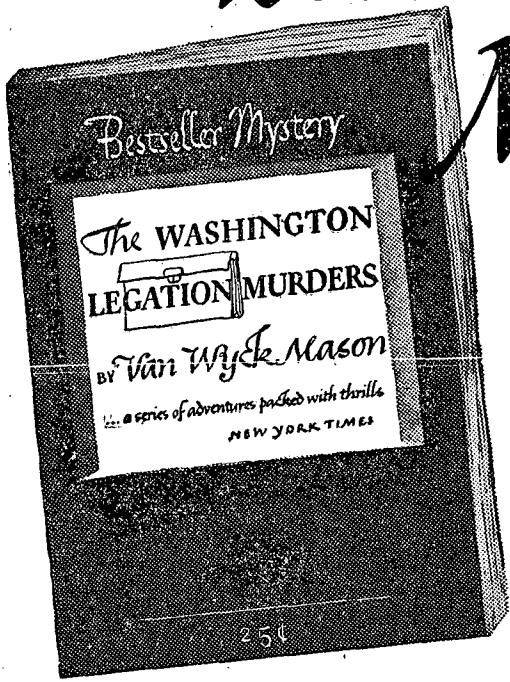

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